# Waiting for the Paraclete

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"Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the door . . . By Me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved . . . Other sheep I have that are not of this fold: them also I must bring. And they shall hear My voice: and there shall be one fold and one shepherd."—*John*, 10, 7, 9, 16.

# Waiting for the Paraclete

## Retreat Lectures

FOR

## Religious and Other Pious Souls

BY

REV. FULGENCE MEYER, O. F. M.
*Missionary*

*Author of*

UNI UNA
PLAIN TALKS ON MARRIAGE
YOUTH'S PATHFINDER
BACK TO GOD
Etc., Etc.

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## Dedication

To my dear Seraphic Father, St. Francis of Assisi, as a token of gratitude for the extraordinary grace and high privilege of wearing his holy garb.

The Author.

"CREATE a clean heart in me, O God: and renew a right spirit in my interior. Cast me not away from Thy face: and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation: and strengthen me with a perfect spirit" (Ps. 59, 12-14).

# FOREWORD

"WAITING FOR THE PARACLETE" is a sequel to "Uni Una"—"To The One God My One Soul"—published five years ago, and now in its eleventh edition.

While this book, too, as its predecessor, is formally addressed to nuns, its subject matter, thanks to the uniformity of human nature in all of us mortals, also applies with little or no changes to men consecrated to God in religious orders, to seminarists, and to priests: in fact, to all God-loving, sin-hating, and reform-eager souls.

We all, men and women, must confess with the poet of old that we are human, and nothing that is human is foreign to us; and with Job: "What is a man that Thou shouldst magnify him? . . . I have sinned . . . and I am become burdensome to myself" (Job, 7, 17, 20).

To help the readers lighten and sweeten the burden they are to themselves by disposing them to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit, is the sole purpose of this book.

THE AUTHOR.

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception,
1930

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# WAITING FOR THE PARACLETE

# LECTURE I.

## The Purpose of the Retreat

> "*They were all filled with the Holy Ghost*" (Acts, 2, 4).

In these few words of the Holy Bible is tersely and comprehensively reported the effect of the first solemn or public retreat held in Christendom. It was an indication and an earnest of the issue every well-conducted and well-made retreat would have in the future. To experience this blessed result in your behalf you are now assembled for retreat. As the apostles on Pentecost Day, you are "all together in one place" for no other reason than to be "filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts, 2, 1, 4). If this purpose is accomplished in regard to each one of the retreatants these spiritual exercises will be an unqualified success, and a most enviable blessing of God for everyone concerned. Jesus now says to you as He said to His first disciples: "I send the promise of My Father upon you: but stay you in the city"—in this place—"till you be endowed with power from on high" (Luke, 24, 49).

### *The Nun's Great Adventure*

There is nothing can happen to a nun that means more to her for this life and the next;

that is more apt to render her religious life worthwhile, full, blessed, exemplary, and inspiring; that is more capable of filling her mind with peace, her heart with joy, and her whole being with happiness; that tends more to give her the ideal conception of convent life, to enthuse her for its sublime objects, and to make her fall thoroughly in love with every phase of it; that is more sure to sweeten her work, glorify her prayer, banish loneliness from her soul, alleviate her sufferings, and give her a zest for the company of her fellow Sisters: there is nothing, in fine, that can make her a better, a more contented, a more God-loving and soul-saving nun than to be "filled with the Holy Ghost".

*They Boast of Their Daughter*

In convents, in the careers of Sisters, various events take place which are considered big, enviable, and desirable by the members of the community as well as by the secular relatives, friends, and acquaintances of the Sisters. Parents and others not seldom boast with a holy pride how well their daughter, or sister, relatively, is doing in the convent, and how glad and elated they are over her success. In speaking thus, they not seldom have reference to the bestowal of honors and preferments, of promotions to positions of trust and respon-

sibility, of well earned and highly coveted degrees in the sciences or arts. Then, too, assignments to attractive places, with a beloved superior, or a favorite subject, or lovable companions are generally looked upon as fortunate incidents in convent life.

*A Distinction from the Pope*

Outstanding successes in founding new establishments, putting up large buildings, paying off big debts, procuring substantial donations for the community, recruiting valuable subjects for the order, delivering learned lectures, writing erudite or popular books, or in similar other activities can be intensely and justly gratifying. So are the expressions of warm appreciation, recognition, and commendation of the work accomplished by a Sister teacher, nurse, or executive on the part of the ecclesiastical authorities: say a nun receives a token of special distinction from the Holy Father himself, or from the bishop in person, or from the President of the United States, or from civic bodies, or from a group of pupils, patients and friends.

Yet all these and like occurrences in the lives of the consecrated brides of Jesus, the Son of God, acceptable and appreciable as they may be in given conditions, are of themselves as nothing compared to the wondrous fortune of

a Sister who is filled with the Holy Ghost. No health of body, excellence, cleverness, or success can redeem the absence of the Holy Ghost in a Sister. No dignity or honor can mean anything at all to her without His presence and influence in her soul.

*Nothing Else Matters*

But the nun who is filled with the Holy Ghost, even though she lack bodily health, or those parts which arrest the attention and challenge the admiration of the outside world or of her own community, is, in her way and measure, to her community and the world at large, like Jesus Christ, her divine Model, "the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men: and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor., 1, 24, 25).

It does not lie within the reach of every Sister to rise to high places in her order; or to become conspicuous for extraordinary gifts and unusual accomplishments; or to win the notice and earn the applause of others on a large scale: but it is altogether within the competency of every nun without exception to be filled with the Holy Ghost. And there is hardly a season in which it is easier for a Sister to be filled with the Holy Ghost than the period of the

holy retreat. This reflection is of itself sufficient to impress us from the start with the inestimable value and blissful fruits of a good retreat.

*They Had Not Heard of Him*

There are only two ways by which a Sister, through her own fault, of course, can fail to receive the fullness of the Holy Ghost, or the greatest bounty that can come to her or to any other soul. These two ways are indicated in two episodes of the Bible. "Paul . . . came to Ephesus and found certain disciples. And he said to them: Have you received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? But they said to him: We have not so much as heard whether there be a Holy Ghost" (Acts, 19, 1, 2). If a nun acts as though she had never heard "whether there be a Holy Ghost"; never recognizes Him in her devotions; never calls upon Him for light and strength; never communes with Him through loving and fervent aspirations; and practically ignores Him in her cloistral life: she will likely receive but little, if any, of His benign influence and heavenly comfort.

*They Were Stiff-necked*

The second way, much worse than the first, of forfeiting the benefits of the Holy Ghost, is thus expressed by St. Stephen in his charge to

the incredulous Jews: "You stiff-necked . . . you always resist the Holy Ghost" (Acts, 7, 51). There are Sisters who maintain a certain stubbornness in resisting the Holy Ghost. They have again and again recognized His influence within them in the way of strong inclinations to supernatural remorse for certain faults and sins they are guilty of; or of distinct suggestions and impulses towards betterment; or of aspirations to greater perfection and higher holiness; or of desires unto heroic endeavors for God and for souls: but they consistently withstand these divine invitations and inspirations, and lend them a deaf ear and an unresponsive heart.

In consequence of their ungrateful attitude the approach of the Holy Spirit to them becomes fainter and less frequent and, if they do not beware betimes, it may die away entirely as far as they are concerned. They have every reason to fear that in their regard may be verified, with reference to the presence and influence of the Holy Ghost within them, the terrible words of St. Paul to the Jews: "To you it behoved us first to speak the word of God: but because you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts, 13, 46). Other souls, who will turn the graces of the Holy Ghost to better account, will receive them instead of

those for whom they were at first intended, but who proved unworthy of them through their indifference and neglect.

*Every Sister Can Do It*

Barring these two cases, every Sister who makes a retreat according to her capacity—God does not expect more—can receive the fullness of the Holy Ghost after the manner of the apostles on Pentecost Day. Of our Lord St. Paul says glowingly: "Jesus Christ, yesterday, and today: and the same forever" (Hebr., 13, 8). He deals with His followers today in the same manner as He dealt with His first disciples. He makes them the same promises regarding eternal life and His helps towards its acquisition. He keeps these promises with the same fidelity. His goodness, love, power, and wisdom are the same.

To you, then, dear Sisters, as to the apostles of yore, Jesus, by calling you to this retreat through the voice of your superior, utters the command that you should not depart from this place, "but should wait for the promise of the Father, which you have heard (saith He) by My mouth . . . You shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence . . . You shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto

Me . . . even to the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts, 1, 4, 5, 8).

*Eagerness and Compliance*

This grand promise of our Saviour regarding everyone of you will be made good beyond question and far in advance of your most eager expectations provided you yield to our Lord's directions and dispose yourself properly unto the reception of the plenitude of the Spirit of God. You will do this by acting in a way that is exactly the opposite to the two aforesaid methods of nullifying the promise of Jesus. The more eager you are to receive the Holy Ghost, and the more ready you are to surrender unreservedly to His guidance, the more likely will the fullness of His loving visitation encompass you.

To render yourself eager for the coming of the Holy Spirit and to create within your soul a strong appetite for His heavenly gifts, you will do well to recall vividly to your mind the meaning and value of the presence and influence of the Third Person of the Most Blessed Trinity to the soul of a Religious. None of us will ever be able fully to comprehend of what benefit the Holy Ghost is or can be to us in our striving after perfection and holiness; but the words of Jesus regarding this important matter

give us sufficient information to make us hunger with all our being after the invaluable bounties of the divine Paraclete.

*They Grew Sad and Depressed*

When Jesus announced to His disciples that He would soon leave them He observed that they grew sad and depressed. He said to them: "Because I have spoken these things to you, sorrow hath filled your heart. But I tell you the truth: it is expedient to you that I go. For if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you: but if I go, I will send Him to you . . . I have yet many things to say to you: but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will teach you all truth" (John, 16, 6, 7, 12, 13). By these words Jesus plainly stated that the invisible influence of the Holy Ghost would mean more to His followers than His own corporal presence and personal company. There is a world of comfort in this statement of our Divine Master.

*Jesus, as an Ember Week Confessor*

Often we are inclined to envy the apostles for their privilege of so long and intimate a converse with Jesus while He was upon this earth in a visible manner. Yet Jesus Himself assures us that the invisible visitation and influence of the Holy Spirit imply a far greater

benefit to the soul than even the visible presence and company of Jesus Christ. At times a Sister is in a spiritual quandary and much perplexed in the mind and troubled of heart; things look darker to her from day to day; her soul grows wearier from moment to moment; and final collapse becomes alarmingly threatening: then she pines and longs for Jesus in His visible person and is quite convinced that if she could only talk to Him as the apostles could and submit her whole case to Him openly and without reserve, she would be sure to find relief, succor, and cheer. And the Sisters in general would congratulate themselves immensely if, let us say, Jesus in His visible person would act as their regular ember week confessor. How they would long for His four annual visits with undisguised eagerness and holy impatience, in order to obtain the sweet consolation, the comforting light, and the soothing strength of His benign direction!

*They Made Little Headway*

Still, Jesus Himself declares that in both these cases the invisible visit and operation of the Holy Ghost benefit the soul more and, consequently, must be more welcome to it than the visible presence of, and association with, Jesus Himself. The story of the disciples of Jesus gives ample proof of this rather strange-

sounding assertion. In the three years in which they had been in our Lord's company continuously, under His immediate and personal tutorship, the hearers of His doctrine, the witnesses of His miracles, and the admirers of His sanctity, they really made little progress in virtue and holiness.

The Master often had to upbraid them for their lack of faith, their spirit of worldly ambition, their self-seeking propensities. They were mutually jealous of one another, carnal-minded, cowardly, incredulous, inconstant, and disloyal. After schooling them in His following for three entire years, Jesus Himself had so little trust in their virtue that He openly declared on the eve of His death: "All you shall be scandalized in Me this night" (Matt., 26, 31). His sad prediction was not made void by the doleful events that followed. On the very day of His resurrection He had to chide His disciples, saying: "O foolish and slow of heart to believe in all things which the prophets have spoken!" (Luke, 24, 25.) Such were the followers of Jesus in spite of the benefit of His personal converse and daily association.

### *A Sudden Transformation*

As soon as the Holy Spirit comes down upon them, however, they are of a sudden transformed and thoroughly sanctified; and so they

remain until their death. Timid before, they are fearless now. Instead of being cowardly and hiding behind closed doors, "for fear of the Jews" (John, 20, 19), they are now courageous and brave. Peter, who had been ignobly conspicuous for his cowardice not long previously, quailing, as he did, before the charge of a mere servant girl, "standing up with the eleven," now lifts "up his voice", saying: "Ye men, brethren, let me freely speak to you . . . Let all the house of Israel know most certainly that God hath made both Lord and Christ, this same Jesus, Whom you have crucified" (Acts, 2, 14, 29, 36). Before the apostles had shrunk cravenly from sufferings and could not even abide the thought of them in connection with Jesus and His kingdom. After they received the Holy Ghost, however, "they indeed went from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the Name of Jesus" (Acts, 5, 41).

*Sisters Change*

The same transformation which the Spirit of God produced in the apostles through His descent upon them at the end of their retreat, He creates in the souls of all those who at the bidding of Jesus make a good retreat in expectation of the Spirit Whom He promises to send them. Sisters who go into retreat anxious,

diffident, scrupulous, and pusillanimous are known to come forth from it composed, confident, trustful, and magnanimous. Sisters who enter upon it with a befuddled mind, a bemuddled conscience, and a despondent, if not despairing, heart, leave it with an easy mind, a clear conscience, and a trustful and hopeful heart. Those who start it with a feeling of bitterness in their souls because of some real or fancied grievance, demotion, ill-success, or some similar disappointment which they have suffered, and the wound of which still rankles and festers within them, end it with the sweet feeling of forgiveness, reconciliation, humility, and resignation to the loving providence of God. Many who begin the retreat in the thraldom of the spirit of tepidity, indifference, and apathy, which makes them insensible to spiritual attractions and averse to exercises of piety and mortification close it in the height of religious fervor, alacrity and optimism, which signifies for them a second conversion that will outrun in ardor as well as in constancy their first turning to God in the balmy days of youthful enthusiasm.

### *An Ordeal and a Torture*

Some there are, too, who make retreat more from moral compulsion than personal desire. They are simply constrained to make it from

human respect. They are bidden to do so by their superiors and have no plausible excuse to offer to be absolved from it. They look upon it as the merest ordeal and veriest torture. They expect no fruit from it whatever. Their soul is in a bad way. It has been thus for so long a time that practically they have accepted the dreary condition as something as inevitable as it is deplorable. They are convinced there is no remedy for their sad and critical spiritual lot. If anything, things will soon be worse rather than better.

Perhaps they have long been living in sin and sacrilege—human nature asserts its utter weakness in every profession and walk of life—and are now living in the proximate occasion of sin, which somehow they do not feel strong enough to eliminate or render sufficiently remote; in fact, it threatens to grow stronger and more irresistible through their sheer impotency under the tyranny of their sinful passion, and to envelop them mercilessly in a final and irreparable catastrophe. This dark and ill-boding prospect follows them as a menacing cloud by day and as a terrifying fire by night.

*The Miracle of the Retreat*

Yet even in their case the Holy Ghost, unless they wilfully shut their eyes to His light,

deafen their ears to His voice, and harden their hearts to His love, will not fail to effect a complete change within them unto their reformation and salvation. The ugly cloud of pessimism, fear, and despair, will yield at once and entirely to His heavenly light, inspiration, and joy; and the glowering pillar of threatening fire will make room for the rejuvenating fire of His divine love, which inflames the heart with a keen desire and bracing hope of holiness and heaven. These and similar miracles are enacted in some measure or degree in retreats incessantly, for of the Holy Ghost we say, too, what St. Paul says of Jesus Christ, as they are one and the same God, that He is "yesterday, and today: and the same forever" (Hebr., 13, 8).

*Their Second Conversion*

For the apostles the coming of the Holy Spirit signified their second conversion to God. Their first one was accomplished as they forsook all things to follow Jesus. As was explained above, their second conversion was much more thorough, comprehensive and lasting than the first. The same spiritual phenomenon is frequently observed among Religious. A certain retreat, usually made in mature life or middle age, constitutes for them a second conversion, similar to that of the apostles on Pentecost Day, also more gripping,

effective, and constant than their first conversion to God at their departure from the world for the cloister. It is also, like the second wine at Cana, sweeter and more delicious than the first.

*Their First Conversion*

At their first conversion they turned to Jesus, attracted by His heavenly ointments, and led on, so to say, by a sort of a blind and potent instinct of love and grace. They then knew little or nothing of religious life, its awful duties, taxing obligations, and staggering responsibilities. When these were revealed to them by and by in their practical import, the ardor of the novices gradually cooled and their enthusiasm for their sublime vocation insensibly subsided under the pressure of the arduous requirements of their new life and the weight of nature's weakness and self-assertion against said requirements. Unconsciously they were beguiled into adopting a mode of living which, much as they tried to disguise it to themselves and others, was more or less a weak compromise between their profession and their infirmity, and a futile attempt to do what our Savior says is impossible, viz.: to serve two masters, or to be both with Him and yet somehow cater to the spirit of the flesh and the world that is against Him.

*A Spiritual Catastrophe*

After a while, usually at a retreat and under the influence of the Holy Ghost, they suddenly awaken from their dangerous spiritual slumber. They start with a nervous fear at what might have been the final issue of it had they not been roused from it. And they turn to God with more loving gratitude and wholehearted consecration than ever before. In the light of their past experiences in the religious life they appreciate the gifts of God more and, to avert another spiritual catastrophe in which "the last state . . . is made worse than the first" (Matt., 12, 45), they are resolved to pay any price of personal sacrifice in order to adhere to their God and their self-immolation for His sake to the end. In their case, indeed, the last state is immensely better than the first.

*No One Can Do It*

No one can make a retreat with a willing and ready heart without undergoing some mutation for the better as a result of it. This mutation will vary according to the spiritual needs and receptivity of the person concerned. While the Holy Spirit came down upon and affected all of the eleven apostles in a general and similar manner, yet the transformation He produced in their souls was at the same

time individual and, therefore, varied. He changed St. Peter's vacillation into firmness, the incredulity of Thomas into faith, and the peculiar sinful weakness of each apostle into the corresponding virtuous strength.

In like manner the Spirit of God acts today in a retreat. He affects all the retreatants in a general way to the increase of their faith, hope, love, compunction, and grace: but in a more special manner He manifests this influence upon the soul of every compliant retreatant in the transformation of his or her undesirable traits and ungodly features into the contrary acceptable characteristics and godlike lineaments.

*We Ought to Know*

Every one of us knows, or by this time ought to know, through our daily particular and general examens, as well as our weekly confessions, in what particular phase of our spiritual life we stand in need of a salutary reformation and conversion on the part of the Holy Ghost. He will unfailingly produce the change we require for our betterment and advancement in holiness if we humbly and patiently wait upon His arrival, attentively and devoutly receive His inspirations, and faithfully and resolutely respond to His impulses.

*Who Is Sister A?*

To illustrate the foregoing we can imagine, for example, that after the retreat the Sisters will say within or among themselves: Have you noticed Sister A? She is so different. She used to be haughty and supercilious. Now she is humble and meek. Vain and boastful before, she is at present modest and reserved. From having been ultra-sensitive and irritable, she has changed into being forebearing and peaceful. Pleasure-loving, giddy, and restless as she had a reputation for being, she is now mortified, reserved, and calm. Much as she liked to go into the world for distraction and diversion before, she now loves cloistral retirement and the seclusion of her cell. Once she was independent, unruly, and rebellious against her superiors: she has now become obedient, yielding, and obsequious to them. Before she was quarrelsome and pugnacious: of a sudden she is winsome and pacific.

*She Declared War*

Sister B was known not to care about rules and to boast that she was beyond and unhampered by whatever regulations. Practically she declared war on discipline and obedience as far as she was concerned. As regards poverty, too, she acted as though she

was under no vow. Freely and wantonly she accepted and disposed of money and sundry things, or used the money or other objects of the community without the permissions that were evidently required. Behold her now, however. How conscientious and timid she has become regarding all the points of obedience and regular observance, and how scrupulous with reference to the keeping of her vow of holy poverty!

*Mum and Glum*

Sisters D and E who, to the continuous disedification and acute displeasure of the community, had not exchanged a word of greeting or a nod of sisterly recognition no one remembers how long, have all at once become mutually conciliatory, forgiving, gracious and nice, to their own and the entire house's comfort and joy. Sisters F and G, who had thrown the little community in which they lived topsy-turvy by their obnoxious and most disagreeable and nauseating particular friendship, have unexpectedly, to the great ecstasy of the Sisters, seen into the childish folly and selfish asininity of their ways, and dismissed from their conduct what had become an eyesore, and a thorn in the flesh, to their fellow Sisters.

*Superiors Change*

Sister H, our superior, who used to mar her exceptional qualities as an executive by a certain aloofness, moodiness, and temperamental unpleasantness, now controls herself wonderfully, and at the approach of every Sister, at any and at all times, is kindness and suavity itself. Sister I, another able superior, whose one weakness was partiality, which made her turn a face of inviting smiles to some of her subjects, and a face of forbidding frowns to others without any objective grounds whatever for her discrimination, has all at once discarded her inclination to have pets and play favorites among the Sisters, and is immeasurably more lovable and successful than before.

*Poverty and Parsimony*

Sister G, also an effective superior, and rather lovable in many ways, because of her misconceived love of poverty, which in her case was really disguised parsimony, was wont to carry on as though she experienced a personal pain every time a Sister made a request, however reasonable in every way, for her individual or the community's needs. Thus she not only rendered religious poverty odious to her subjects, but was even the cause, in more cases than one, of their acting

independently regarding the satisfaction of their wants. Now it is surprising what a change for the better her conceptions of the vow of poverty and the just and equitable treatment of the Sisters have undergone. The entire community life in her house is cheerier, happier, and more godly in consequence. Instead of idly or maliciously thinking of others in this connection, be sure to give the Sisters something gratifying to say in your regard after this retreat.

*Clean Water*

Whatever may be our individual spiritual wants, and however diversified they no doubt are, we all have every reason, now that the retreat is beginning, to plead with the Holy Spirit to bestow upon us the gift He promised us through the prophet Ezechiel, saying: "I will pour upon you clean water" — tears of true contrition — "and you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness . . . And I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and will give you a heart of flesh" (Ezech., 36, 25, 26).

Owing to the infirmity and instability of human nature, and to the continual and fierce struggle of the flesh against the spirit, our heart, as far as the love of God is concerned,

has the weakness of gradually growing cold, hard, and insensible: or of turning into stone. In the annual retreat we must change whatever there is of this stony nature in our hearts into soft, vivid, and pulsating flesh. If somehow we have grown to be "without affection" (Rom., 1, 31) to God, we are now going to recover all the tenderness of affection and sweetness of love we may have forfeited since our last retreat.

*He Has Somewhat Against You*

With reference to your previous retreat, and the burning love you had for God at the close of it, as you now recall it vividly to your mind, Jesus very likely has reason to reprove you as He reproved the bishop of Ephesus, saying: "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first charity. Be mindful, therefore, from whence thou art fallen: and do penance and do the first works" (Apoc., 2, 4, 5). The prime object of the annual retreat is to restore to us our first love for Jesus and revive our first and best works in His service. This decided and complete annual reformation of ourselves is the great secret of true perfection and genuine sanctity.

*A Baby Voice*

In this connection there comes to mind a little story from which, frivolous as it may

appear in itself, you may draw some salutary inferences regarding yourself. Some time ago a gentleman told me laughingly that, as he was bent on using the telephone for a business of importance, it chanced that the lines were crossed and he unwittingly got in on a lovers' conversation to which for a moment he could not help listening, owing to its peculiar human interest. A love-sick young lady, in the most plaintive baby voice imaginable, was blaming her lover on the other end of the line, whining rather pitifully: "You do not love me any more as you used to." The swain, who was obviously embarrassed, for the charge seemed to have had some foundation, replied: "Sure, I love you as much as ever." The girl rejoined: "You do not call me up so often as formerly." The youth answered that he was busier than before; hence she should not worry about his less frequent calls. Then the girl charged: "You do not call me your baby any more, as you always did." The young man explained that their love was more sober and staid now; hence it no longer required any pet names for its nutrition. The girl insisted: "You no longer let me have my will as you did before." To this the young man merely stammered a tentative answer, when my reporter hung up the receiver.

*Keen Psychology*

Whatever else we may think of this romantic affair, we cannot but admire and applaud the keen psychological knowledge and correct judgment of the girl. By the intuition which seems natural to woman she was not slow in sensing the gradual diminution of the love in her presumptive suitor.

Taking the matter seriously, since you became a spouse of Jesus through your solemn consecration to His love and service, maybe Jesus in this retreat will have a complaint to make to you like the one the girl made to her lukewarm lover. Pleadingly He will whisper to you, calling you by name: "Sister X, you do not love Me any more as you used to. You do not commune with Me so frequently and glowingly as of yore by loving aspirations and fervent ejaculations. Your prayers are not so regular and devout, your thoughts of My presence not so incessant, your spiritual Communions not so uninterrupted, your actual Communions and confessions not so frequent, your desires for holiness and moral heroism not so intense, as they were at the end of the last retreat. Nor do you call Me, with the spiritual gusto of those blessed days, the many pet names and endearing titles which came so natural

to you then, but for which you now seem to have lost all relish and inclination.

*His Chief Complaint*

"But My chief complaint is, you do not let Me have My will as you did before. At that time, no matter what I asked you to do; or where to go; or what to suffer; or whatever I disposed in your regard: you abided cheerfully and thankfully by My will. To do My will, as it was made known to you through the various agencies through which I operate, was your food and drink, the very breath of your life, and the supreme pleasure of your existence. You never winced, or fretted, or murmured, or sulked inwardly or outwardly. But now, how different! You have grown to be so sensitive, fretful, fastidious, and self-assertive in many things regarding My unquestionable dispositions, that I cannot help believing and telling you that you do not love Me any more as you used to."

*Do Not Stammer*

If under this charge you feel nonplussed and at a loss as to what you should rejoin in the way of defense or apology, do not stammer anything meaningless or something that will compromise you more, but simply beat your breast in humble sorrow and exclaim,

after the manner of the man in the gospel story who, "crying out, with tears, said: I do believe, Lord. Help my unbelief" (Mark, 9, 23). And Jesus forthwith banished the unclean spirit from the man's son. So you must cry out with tears: "Lord, I do love Thee now. Help my lack of love for Thee!" And at once the baneful spirit of tepidity and indifference will be banished in order to make room for the Holy Spirit of heavenly fervor and devotion.

*Talking Was Her Weakness*

In California, while preaching a mission, I met a pastor who was much pestered by a lady who called him on the telephone in season and out of season for no other reason than to indulge her urge for idle and vapid talk. He amused me by telling me that, after he was aware it was she who was calling, after a greeting or two he would put the receiver down on the table for about a quarter of an hour and resume his desk work while she continued talking. I asked if she did not notice and resent it that he was not listening. He replied that she did not observe it. She was so bent on talking that she kept it up without giving the other party a chance to get in a word. Hence she did not know if he was listening or not.

*Sister, Are You There?*

She evidently deserved this treatment; and the pastor only did his duty by ignoring her meaningless chatter and attending to his business. But, alas, Jesus the Divine Spouse of nuns, was often in a mood to speak to your heart throughout the year. Instead of listening to Him with a grateful, docile, and loving heart, maybe you often put down the receiver, as it were, to turn your attention to other and not seldom frivolous matters. It is not hard for you to imagine your divine Lover's reaction to this uncivil and unappreciative treatment.

In this regard our Savior could often have reversed the picture of the child knocking at the tabernacle door and asking Jesus if He was there. Calling you by name He might have said again and again: "Sister——, are you there?" But in more cases than one, unlike the child in the story, He might have got no response to His loving appeal to you: "Behold I stand at the door and knock" (Apoc., 3, 20). No one was at home, in your heart, for Him. For whatever such slights you have been guilty of in the past year you can now make complete atonement for to your divine Lover by saying sincerely and invitingly: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth" (1 Kings, 3, 10).

# LECTURE II.

## Two Classes of Religious

*"They were all filled with the Holy Ghost"* (Acts, 2, 4).

As in the Church at large so, too, in every religious community there are two classes of members. Wherever human nature is operative in an appreciable number of subjects, these two classes are sure to be represented. Hence they are no doubt to be found in your community also.

### *They Are Far in the Majority*

The first class is made up of those Religious, who are unquestionably far in the majority in your order. They find the yoke of the Lord to be very sweet and His burden light. To them, in fact, convent life is a privilege rather than a yoke, and more of a pleasure than a burden. Anything and everything in connection with it brings joy to their soul and solace to their heart. The holy habit is for them the dearest garb on earth. They kiss it lovingly and gratefully every time they don or doff it, and they wax in the appreciation of their sacred vocation with each day's wearing of it.

*The Livery of Jesus*

Plain, humble, and coarse though it be—or just because it is so—they would not exchange their cloister uniform for any princely or queenly garb in all the world; neither do they, nor can they, envy any lady in the world for all her finery of satins and silks and costly laces, embroidered with silver and gold trimmings of priceless value, and whatever splendor of attire the world admires and the feminine heart naturally craves. They are immeasurably happier in their penitential livery of Jesus Christ than any woman, clothed with the ermine and other pompous apparel of a kingdom or an empire, can be. Their one big personal mystery of life is how God could ever deign to allow them to wear a habit that has been and is sanctified by so many holy women who have worn and wear it, and that contains in it for its faithful wearer the promise of an unspeakably beauteous and ravishing garb of glory in heaven.

*A Lovely Prison*

The convent walls, which the unbelieving world tauntingly calls prison walls, fill the good nun with a feeling of spiritual protection, restfulness, and rejoicing. Behind these walls she is happy to be a prisoner for life, since she has for her continual companion

and comforter the divine Prisoner of Love, Whose presence and company alone convert the plainest and poorest convent prison into so joyous and entrancing an abode for the loyal nun that the richest and gayest palace of the world, in comparison with it, is but a wretched and torturing dungeon. Hence she would not exchange her conventual imprisonment for any real or pretended personal freedom and independence a woman or girl in the world enjoys. Her life's greatest boast is that of St. Paul: to be "the prisoner of Jesus Christ" (Eph., 3, 1), Whose love for her compelled Him to be her Prisoner of Love. The only time she ever wants to bid farewell to her dear convent prison walls is when her divine Prisoner invites her to occupy with Him forever His castle of everlasting glory in heaven. Outside of heaven she knows of no place in which she delights so much in being as in her beloved convent, the antechamber of the celestial paradise.

### *Love-Sick and Broken-Hearted*

The incredulous world is convinced the nun's cloistered prison is cheerless and joyless, because it knows, or assumes to know, that it is loveless. The world likes to picture the nun as a disappointed and broken-hearted love-sick woman, who pines aimlessly, hopelessly, and

desperately for love, to bestow and receive love, without any prospect of satisfaction or relief. Here the words of Jesus come to mind as being applicable to the ignorant and supercilious world: "If thou didst know the gift of God" (John, 4, 10), thou wouldst not speak in so absurd and irreverent a manner.

The convent, separated and absconded from the distractions, disturbance, and interference of the world by its protecting walls, is to the faithful nun, in a mystic and the best sense of the word, an ideal love nest, according to the words of the Bible: "The sparrow hath found herself a house, and the turtle a nest for herself . . . Thy altars, O Lord of hosts: My King and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house, O Lord: they shall praise Thee for ever and ever" (Ps. 83, 4-6).

*She Pines for Love*

If the nun pines for love, therefore, it is not for the love of man, which is known to be fickle, unreliable, shortlived, and unsatisfying in most instances, but her "soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord". "How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!" she exclaims day and night, adding: "My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God" (*ib.*, *passim*). The longer she is in the convent and the better she becomes acquainted with

"the goodness and kindness of God our Savior" (Tit., 3, 4), the more she sighs with regard to Jesus, her Spouse: "I languish with love . . . My Beloved to me, and I to Him, Who feedeth among the lilies" (Cant., 2, 5, 16).

*She Asks One Favor*

In return for its hard and cold taunt the dutiful Religious asks the world for but one favor: to forget about her entirely and not to disturb in any way her happy mystic love nest and her delicious converse with the heavenly Lover and Beloved of pure and holy virgins. The love nests of the world are often poetic misnomers. Under a veneer of apparent happiness many a so-called love nest hides a volume of unspeakable misery and heartache. There are not many even among the noblest and best women of the world whose dreams of human love have not been hideously shocked and ruthlessly blasted in what the world calls love nests, and from which these women would welcome a respectable release with all the relief and joy of their soul. They may need and accept pity on the part of their fellowmen.

As for the true Religious and their experiences of substantial love and other gratifications of the heart, they neither want nor welcome the misdirected compassion of the

world. With the Apostle they reply to its expression: "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who is against us?" (Rom., 8, 31.) And they add with the Psalmist: "How good is God to Israel: to them that are of a right heart!" (Ps. 72, 1.)

*Wilhelm Tell and Cardinal Wolsey*

The pathetic farewell of Wilhelm Tell to the Alps and the valleys of Switzerland, and the touching farewell of Cardinal Wolsey to all his glory do not in any degree express the keen pain of parting the ordinary Sister would experience if she were forced, as some of them have been and are still forced in some countries, to bid goodbye to her dear convent home and to live away from it. Her daily and nightly prayer is: "One thing I have asked of the Lord, this will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life" (Ps. 26, 4). Dwelling secure and happy in this house, her only message to the incredulous votaries of the world is, after the manner of Jesus, her Bridegroom: "Weep not over me; but weep for yourselves and your children" (Luke, 23, 28).

*She Likes Them Tight*

The holy vows, which the world looks upon as the factors of the most unnatural, galling,

and tyrannical bondage, are for the true nun the bands of her sweet and purely voluntary captivity of love for Christ, with Christ, and in Christ. The tighter they are, and the closer they constrain her inferior nature, and subdue in her the dangerous three-fold concupiscence, the more she feels fastened to and united with Jesus, her divine Spouse, and the safer and happier she is in consequence. To the good nun the bands of the holy vows are in the spiritual life what a solid and reliable life-saving belt is to its beneficiary in the deep sea. Far from being a hindrance they are welcomed and prized by her as the most trustworthy safety devices against sinking into the bottomless sea of sin and destruction. They render it easy and sweet for her to stay afloat in virtue and rectitude, to steer continually towards perfection and holiness, and in God's own time to land in the harbor of salvation in the best of condition. As relieved and glad as Peter was when at the angel's bidding "the chains fell off from his hands" (Acts, 12, 7), so disappointed and chagrined a good nun would feel if she were absolved from her holy vows.

*A Volume of Delight*

The daily obligations of convent life: the prayers, attendance at Holy Mass, the re-

ception of the sacraments, the program of work, meals, recreation, and rest, as well as the community life with the Sisters contain a volume of delight for the God-loving nun. Every time the bell rings for a new exercise, and it is practically ringing all the day long with short intervals, she seems to hear an inner voice saying to her: "The Master . . . calleth for thee." And she follows the example of Mary Magdalen who, "as soon as she heard this, riseth quickly and cometh to Him" (John, 11, 28, 29).

*A Dance, Show, or Excursion*

No lady of the world is so eager and glad to go to a dance or show or on an excursion as the faithful nun is to answer the call of holy obedience to the various practices of her convent life. The explanation of her conduct is easy. There is no power so controlling as is that of love. No one loves more than a woman loves. No woman can be more in love with anyone or anything than the loyal nun is in love with Jesus Christ, by Whom, with Whom, and in Whom she lives, breathes, thinks, speaks, and acts every moment of her life. For her, indeed, the yoke of the Lord is sweet, and His burden light. The convent for her is, in truth, the vestibule of heaven in which she enjoys a more than

shadowy anticipation of the "refreshment, light, and peace" (Roman Missal), waiting for her in the world to come.

*The Reverse Side*

Here, however, we must contemplate the reverse side of the picture and bemoan the weakness and fallibility of human nature even in the most sacred places and in the most holy environments. Side by side with the aforesaid Sisters who, as was said, form the large bulk of our religious communities of women, there are others, very few in number in proportion, thank God, for whom the yoke of the Lord, in the form of the cloistral life, is unspeakably bitter, and who find His burden to be unbearably heavy. They wince and fret and murmur under it more and more from day to day. It seems to be just a question of time as to their freeing themselves from it altogether once for all.

*Held Captives*

The religious habit, which they had donned with so much youthful enthusiasm and gratitude, has lost all the appeal it ever possessed for them and, if they could do it without feeling dishonored before their relatives, friends, and acquaintances, they would dismiss it definitely rather today than to-

morrow. The convent walls are for them prison walls in the ugliest and most irritating sense of the word. They are held captive within them by their human respect as through moral compulsion, and day and night they cast longing glances beyond them into the world, of whose liberty they are jealous and whose sweet atmosphere of independence, as they fancy it, they yearn for with all the ardor of their being. It is a veritable torture for them to put on the holy habit every morning, and they feel a certain, though cruel, because momentary, relief in divesting themselves of it at night, sighing and wishing the while they might be in a position to discard it forever.

*They Drag the Cross*

For them the vows of religion are in reality heavy, cold, and heartless bands. They carry them most reluctantly and restively, eager and ready to extricate themselves from them as much as they can afford to be while they maintain an air of respectability before their fellow Sisters and others. But the more they try to lighten these bands by unlawful concessions to their self-indulgence the faster and more vexing they become. The more they drag the cross of Christ instead of carrying it lustily, the heavier it appears to be; and

the more they wantonly try to whittle it down, the larger it grows in their regard. They are thoroughly and desperately unhappy.

There was a period in their religious life when the convent was their element. They were happy in it alone, and unhappy outside of it. It was to them what the expanse of water is to the fish and the freedom of the air to the bird. But a complete reversal has set in in their feelings. Convent life grates on them as much now as it soothed them before. They hate it as violently today as they fervently loved it of yore.

*The Bell Peeves Them*

Each exercise of their cloistral program is a new tax on their patience and a fresh irritation of their morbid nervous system. Every sound of the bell peeves them anew and provokes their inward rebellion afresh. The more they bewail their unhappy lot and the more they pity themselves because of it, the harder it is to bear and the less becomes their stock of endurance. They are continuously on the verge of absolute moral collapse and are balancing themselves threateningly on the brink of final apostasy. At times their companions, or at least one or two of them, are aware of their utter misery and

their precarious spiritual condition: then, again, it may be known to themselves and God alone. They may be playing the role of Jeckyll and Hyde: pretending to be contented and happy outwardly, while they are fiercely discontented and unhappy inwardly. According to their exterior behavior they appreciate and love the convent, whereas their inner selves revolt against and abhor it. For them, in truth, the yoke of the Lord is intolerably bitter, and His burden is heavy beyond human utterance.

*Why the Difference?*

What explains, therefore, how there can be so vast a difference in the attitude of two Sisters who both live in the same convent; are of the same profession class; have received the same ascetical training and experienced the same spiritual influences since their entrance into the convent; often have the same dispositions and talents, and are engaged in the same work, in the same environment, and under the same superior? What accounts for the great dissimilarity in the spirit of these two nuns? In cases of normal subjects—and we are now considering no others—there is only one explanation. One of these Sisters is filled with, while the other is devoid of, the Holy Ghost. One has

a heart of flesh, whereas the other has a heart of stone. One is well acquainted and continuously communes with the Holy Ghost. The other seems to have forgotten that there is a Holy Ghost. One always yields to the Spirit of God in the same degree as the other stubbornly resists Him. As a result, the religious spirit of the one has grown apace, while that of the other is dead and gone.

*A Blasphemous Remark*

I recall the irreverent, yea, blasphemous remark made by a prominent non-Catholic clergyman of the South, who explained the torpid religious condition of his parish by saying to a group of laymen, one of whom was a Catholic, that the Holy Ghost was played out as an evangelical factor in his denomination, and that they simply had to find something to take His place if they were going to hold and influence their people somehow. The Holy Ghost never has been a factor in non-Catholic Christian churches, so-called. Some of them are only now beginning to notice it, it seems.

*They Are Dead*

But what we have to weep over is—and it will be wise to think of ourselves in reference to this matter—that some Religious act as

though, speaking with all reverence, the Holy Ghost were played out as a spiritual factor in their regard, since He no longer sways them or makes the least impression upon them. In spite of their deceiving external appearance Jesus says to them in the terrible words of the Apocalypse (3, 1): "I know thy works, that thou hast the name of being alive. And thou art dead." That last sentence is crushingly short, direct, and final. It could not be more so. It was spoken by God to the bishop of Sardis, whom the Bible calls the angel of Sardis. More than one unhappy nun may be called an angel in all sincerity by various people who look upon her as an angel of God, even as some of the first Christians of Sardis no doubt considered their bishop an angel of the Lord.

*No One Is Safe*

Furthermore, if a bishop of the first Church, when one of the apostles was still living and preaching in his very territory, and when martyrs were dying for Christ day for day, and the very atmosphere was fraught with a high and holy enthusiasm for the spread of the kingdom of Jesus upon earth, could die entirely to the Holy Ghost and His influence, no Religious whatever, let her belong to the most rigorous order and the

most fervent convent in the world, is safe against this death that creeps on one gradually and overtakes one insensibly through the initial attack of slight temptations and venial lapses which easily and quickly grow into gross sins and hideous violations of the pledges made to God.

*He Was Unconscious*

The bishop of Sardis appears to have been quite unconscious of his spiritual death. The notice of it was doubtless news to him. And yet he was dead. Had he only had the name of being dead: or had people spoken of him and to him of his being dead to grace, this might have roused him to a sense of duty, shame, and remorse, and induced him to recover the life of God's grace. Now the crown of his misfortune was that, dead though he was, people considered and proclaimed him to be alive, and thereby perhaps made him believe that he was alive.

The same sad lot befalls one or the other unhappy Sister. She, too, though spiritually altogether dead, since she reacts to no impulse of the Holy Ghost whatever, still has the name among the Sisters and others who know her of being quite alive in the spiritual and religious life. They think rather well of her and even look upon her and put her up

to others as a model. This circumstance but renders her, so to say, more dead. If others but knew and openly declared to her that she was lost to grace and salvation, this general knowledge and report might move her to enter into herself and correct her ways and, with the help of the Holy Ghost, come back to life. But now, alas, though she is dead, she has the name of being alive.

*There Are Degrees*

I am well aware that the two classes of nuns, as I have described them in this chapter, are not found so distinctly classified in real life. There are grades, ranging from the highest to the lowest, in both classes. Then, too, there are nuns who disclose a great deal of the presence of the Holy Spirit in them in one phase of their life, while they discover a noticeable absence of Him and His influence in another feature of their deportment. They are obviously not *filled* with the Holy Ghost, but possess Him only in an imperfect measure. Moreover, there are nuns who at one time belonged to the first category, and now they are members of the second. Others there are who once belonged to the second, but are now quite up in the first. Our first effort in the retreat must be to ascertain our standing with regard to

the Spirit of God and the degree of His possession or non-possession of us, and to act accordingly in pleading to Him for immediate redress of whatever we may find wrong with us.

*A Heartening Reflection*

Here it will be distinctly comfortable to recall that *all* the apostles were filled with the Holy Ghost. Not a single one was excepted. Nor did anyone of them receive less than the fullness of the heavenly Spirit. When our Lord promised them that He would send them the power from on high, St. Peter, in view of his unfortunate experience a little over a month previous, might have grown sad and said within himself: "There is no doubt Jesus will keep His word and send all of us the Holy Ghost, but owing to my past disloyalty I shall likely receive less of the Holy Spirit than all the others. While I fully deserve this treatment, the thought of it depresses me none the less."

St. Peter's love for and trust in Jesus would not allow any such thoughts or feelings to start in him. He felt he would be dealt with as generously as the others. In this he was not disappointed. He received rather more than less of the Holy Ghost in comparison with the rest of the disciples. At any rate, he

was the first one to come out in the open and give evidence of the fullness of the divine Spirit which he had received by preaching Jesus Christ crucified without fear and human respect, converting three thousand people to Jesus by his first sermon, which number mounted to five thousand at his second discourse.

*The Last Will Be First*

There is just as little reason for any Sister in retreat to discount the promise Jesus makes her of sending her the Holy Ghost because of the spiritual reverses and misfortunes she may have suffered in the past, either long ago or quite recently. Maybe since her last retreat she committed her first mortal sin in the convent or, probably in her whole life; or possibly she fell deeper into sin than ever before, and did things which she never dreamed she could ever be guilty of, and the mere remembrance of which makes her very soul sick with horror. At any rate she did not fall so low as St. Peter fell through his denial of Christ; hence she, too, must have full and absolute trust in the goodness and magnanimity of Jesus, and be convinced she will fare as well as any other retreatant. Who knows, she may even fare best of all, thanks to the boundless mercy and infinite benignity

of God, Who loves to choose the weak to confound the strong, and the foolish to put to shame the wise, that all the world may know that whatever virtue there is comes from Him alone, and that no flesh has any reason to glory in His sight.

And as St. Peter entered into the cenacle as the greatest one-time sinner of the eleven apostles, but issued from it as the first and foremost soul-saver of them all: so, too, the Sister who has entered this retreat with the saddest record of sin among all the participants of the retreat, provided she is humble, contrite, and trustful as St. Peter was, may leave it as the greatest and most effective apostle or soul-saver of them all. God is good; and to His goodness there are no bounds.

### *They Kept What They Had*

All the eleven apostles were not only filled with the Holy Ghost, but they preserved this fullness of the Holy Spirit within them until their death. This, alas, does not happen as a consequence of every retreat, not because of a lack on the part of the Holy Ghost, but because of the lack of cooperation on the part of those to whom He comes in the retreat. There is a vast difference in the annual conversions of Sisters in a retreat.

In the one the conversion goes deep into her soul and encompasses it entirely. It changes her conduct noticeably for the better. The change is complete and lasting. She has evidently become a saint to stay one always. She offered the Holy Spirit no resistance whatever: hence her wonderful spiritual success.

*It Does Not Grip Her Soul*

Another Sister making the same retreat manifests a degree of earnestness during the retreat. She is punctual at every exercise and conscientious about the observance of all the prescriptions of the retreat. Yet with it all her retreat is superficial in its effort, and does not grip the very essence of her soul, nor does it affect the innermost core of her heart. It produces some observable accidental changes in her conduct as an improvement, but this improvement does not reach far enough; neither does it last long.

Soon, say in several weeks, if not earlier, she will be the same she was before the retreat. She may not have offered the Holy Ghost any positive resistance, but she resisted Him negatively by not giving Him the opportunity to influence her as much and as permanently as He would. Even though she did not say so or admit it expressly to

herself she was minded not to get too good in the retreat, but, as she put it, to remain human and sensible. In her case these words are euphemisms for comfortable and self-indulgent.

*An Idle Worry*

An elderly Irish lady, who had long had the custom of receiving Holy Communion only at long intervals of several months, was told by her pastor that she should receive our Lord every week, yea, every day. To this exhortation she replied naively: "Father, I don't see why you want to run a good thing into the ground."

In like manner the aforesaid Religious seem to fear lest by too much fervor and conscientiousness they might run a good thing into the ground. Hence their scrupulous cautiousness against what they like to call dangerous enthusiasm which might disturb their ease and convenience.

If Jesus had been guided by the same ill-conceived care not to run the love of us into the ground, there would have been no redemption. And if those Religious keep on guarding against running their love of their divine Bridegroom into the ground, there will be no sanctity and, possibly even, no salvation for them.

As Jesus loved us to the end, without limit or measure, He wants us to love Him to the utmost of our capacity: for His honor and glory as well as for our temporal and eternal peace and happiness. In no endeavor at all are half measures satisfying: in none are they less so than in the pursuit of God's love and the acquisition of heaven.

*It Pierces Her Flesh*

"Think of the Lord in goodness, and seek Him in the simplicity of heart. For He is found by them who tempt Him not . . . The Holy Spirit of discipline will flee from the deceitful" (Wisdom, 1, 1, 2, 5). By the mere making of a retreat a Sister at least virtually declares she is ready, yea, eager to receive the fullness of the Holy Ghost. If she is not deceitful in this outward profession of a complete return and adhesion to God which are implied in the very participation in a retreat; and if she is not tempting God by an empty pretense of self-reformation, or a desire of only a semi-conversion, she will pray with all sincerity in the words of the Psalmist (Ps. 118, 120): "Pierce Thou my flesh with Thy fear: for I am afraid of Thy judgments." She is not satisfied with having the surface of herself scratched, as it were, by the fear of the Lord. She wants this fear

to pierce her through and through, kill her old self, and make of her a new creature of God fashioned in every detail after her heavenly Model and divine Spouse, Jesus Christ. "Create a clean heart in me, O God: and renew a right spirit within my bowels" (Ps. 50, 12).

# LECTURE III.

## The Time and the Place of the Retreat

*"They were all filled with the Holy Ghost"*
(Acts, 2, 4).

In order to make sure of the full reception of the Holy Ghost as a result of these spiritual exercises it is mandatory to observe closely the directions our Savior gave the apostles for their retreat preparatory to the advent of the Spirit of God. Jesus Himself, to render its effect secure, as it were, arranged the retreat of His disciples in detail. He assigned the time, the place, the manner, and the length of the retreat He bade them to make. What He did with regard to the apostles in His own person He now does on our behalf through our superiors. We must obey their directions referring to our retreat as conscientiously as the apostles obeyed the directions of Jesus as to theirs, if we are to receive the Holy Spirit as they received Him.

### *The Time of the Retreat*

Jesus appointed the time for the retreat of the disciples by charging them to begin it immediately after His departure from them. He left them no choice at all in the matter.

His assignment was final. Maybe, speaking humanly, for one or the other apostle the time did not seem to be the most opportune. After all the excitement of the previous forty-three days their minds were too unsettled and discomposed to allow the recollection needed for a retreat. They had not yet come to from all the agitation of our Lord's passion and death, the surprise of His resurrection, the novel experiences of His apparitions in His risen body, and now from the sadness over His departure. It would be wise, therefore, to wait a while and let their new thoughts and feelings mature quietly and leisurely. And when they would gain their composure of spirit, and be properly orientated respecting all the wondrous occurrences of which they had been the witnesses, and got the correct perspective of their condition and vocation: then, but hardly before, they would be in a position to make a good retreat.

*They Might Have Objected*

Or several of the disciples might have had objections of a practical and economical nature against the time fixed by the Master for their retreat. They might have remarked that, since they had been absent from their homes for months, owing to the recent ex-

traordinary events, they really had to hurry home at once in order to despatch matters of business which could no longer be delayed. They were losing money and suffering considerable embarrassment as it was. Various persons and diverse transactions were urgently clamoring for their presence and attention. Hence there could be no thought of their making retreat forthwith. When they were relieved of the aforesaid cares and their mind was at rest they would be ready to make retreat.

But the apostles had or at least yielded to no such misgivings regarding the time appointed by Jesus for their retreat. In their minds His promise of the power from on high was so overtoweringly grand that anything that might come in its way had simply to be overridden and ignored as being inconsequential and negligible in comparison. It was the one thing they felt they needed and for which they therefore yearned with all their soul, and were bent on acquiring at any cost. Hence they gladly acquiesced in our Savior's arrangement as to the time of their retreat, and their reward for it was the fullness of the visitation of the Holy Ghost upon them.

*They Balk*

It not seldom happens that, when superiors assign to their subjects the time for their retreat, there are those among the subjects who are inclined to find fault with the assignment in their regard. For some reason or other the time seems very unseasonable and thoroughly objectionable. They have so much business on hand that requires their immediate and personal attention. Or things are threatening to turn up that will call for their individual presence: hence they cannot afford to absent themselves even in the interest of their retreat. Or, personally, they are not at all in a favorable mood for the retreat. For some reason or other they are terribly upset in the mind, and their conscience is in such a chaotic condition that it would be folly and a mere loss of time for them to attempt a retreat until they are themselves again and in a fit disposition for the retreat. Or, if mentally and spiritually they have no complaint, their physical state is such as to dissuade them positively from undertaking the taxing ordeal of a retreat. It would be a ruinous and suicidal enterprise for them in their actual precarious bodily condition.

*Superiors Are Not Infallible*

Superiors, even as subjects, are neither omniscient nor infallible. Consequently, in the assignment of the time for the retreats of their subjects they may and at times do choose a season which for a particular subject is impractical and unpropitious, yea, morally or physically impossible. In such cases a sensible and considerate superior does not take it at all amiss if the subject humbly and in good time apprises her of the inconvenience or impossibility prevailing, and the superior will change the schedule accordingly. Outside of these solid reasons calling for a change of time there are perhaps ever so many fictitious, imaginary, or insufficient reasons which actuate a number of religious to balk at going to the retreat at the time assigned them. Some have contracted a veritable habit of contrariness in the matter, so that the superior can never fix a time that is suitable to them. The very assignment of it by the superior is enough to render it unsuitable and injudicious in the eyes of these obstreperous subjects. And not seldom there is, as they say, method in their madness. Their principal motive in finding the time set by the superior for the retreat unseasonable is their desire to escape the retreat entirely, or hypocritically to supply

it by a so-called private retreat of their own, by which they may in their blindness deceive themselves, but by no means do they succeed in deceiving God nor the community. The only losers in this sinister process are they themselves.

*The Spirit of Jesus*

All good Religious: hence the great majority of Religious, in spite of some real or apparent difficulties in the way of their designated retreat, because of the time of it, readily and gladly fall in with the arrangement of their superior, and find a way to adjust matters quite satisfactorily in order to be able to do it with mental calm and composure. In their minds the result of the retreat: the full reception of the Holy Ghost is so big and wonderful and desirable that ordinary hindrances that threaten to come in the path of it are either not seen or they are dealt with in keeping with their importance or non-importance. These Religious, for their spirit of quick and wholehearted obedience, never fail to be richly and permanently visited by the "Spirit of Jesus" (Acts, 16, 7).

*Biblical Numbers and Seasons*

God is known to have attached the bestowal of His unusual favors to certain

seasons and to an appointed number of days or years. When these were observed in keeping with His ordinance His bounty has never been withheld. Thus we read in the book of Deuteronomy: "In the seventh year thou shalt make a remission, which shall be celebrated in this order. He to whom anything is owing from his friend or neighbor or brother, cannot demand it again: because it is the year of the remission of the Lord" (Deut., 15, 1, 2). Why was the seventh year more a year of the remission of the Lord than any other years? Because God so wanted it. In the same way the week of the retreat is in a most pronounced way the week of the remission of the Lord when He more readily forgives us all our sins, even as He bids us to forgive all the injuries we have ever received from others.

*The Ominous Number Seven*

Again, in the book of Josue (6, 2 *sqq.*), we read that the Lord charged Josue, saying: "Behold I have given into thy hands Jericho, and the king thereof, and all the valiant men. Go round about the city, all ye fighting men, once a day: so shall ye do for six days. And on the seventh day . . . you shall go about the city seven times . . .: and the walls of the city shall fall to the ground." Here, too,

God was partial to the number seven, or a fixed period of days. But for its observance the Jews would not have taken the fortress of the enemy and conquered the promised land. To the holy retreat with its established duration God in a similar manner joins the granting of His extraordinary help to conquer the enemies of our soul and to overthrow their stronghold in us, whatever it may be, altogether and forever. The great faith all Christendom has in novenas, from which many of the faithful derive very uncommon benefits from God, is but a confirmation of the truth that God loves to connect the imparting of His riches with the keeping of His set favorite seasons, one of the foremost of which is the holy retreat. It is, in the spiritual life of a Religious, not seldom the tide of which Shakespeare writes:

> "There is a tide in the affairs of men
> Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
> Omitted, all the voyage of their life
> Is bound in shallows and in miseries."

The gross neglect of the graces of a single retreat may sinisterly affect the entire afterlife of a Religious.

*The Place of the Retreat*

In addition to the time, Jesus also designated the place in which He desired the

apostles to make their retreat. "Stay you in the city," He said, "till you be endued with power from on high" (Luke, 24, 49). Their place of assembly in the city of Jerusalem was the cenacle. In it, therefore, their retreat was to be made according to our Lord's directions.

Here, again, one or the other apostle might have demurred, saying: "I do not like Jerusalem for retreat. Somehow I never could like that city. It is too busy and noisy a place for recollection and prayer. All kinds of distractions and disturbing thoughts burst in upon me whenever I am there. Besides I have relatives or friends there. As soon as they find out I am there, they will look me up and embarrass me variously. Furthermore, the events that have occurred there in these past two months are not of a nature to foster calm and quiet of mind and heart. They will recall great worries and fierce anxieties with much consequent fear and perturbation of soul. I remember how afraid we were as we tenanted that very place after Jesus' death and on His resurrection day. We kept the doors locked continuously for fear of the Jews. They are more rabid and savage now than they were then. With the incessant fear of their hatred and fury haunting us there can be no prospect of a peaceful and

satisfying retreat. No worse place could have been assigned us than Jerusalem for this retreat. I would rather go to Capernaum, which lies so beautifully on the sea, or to Bethsaida, or Bethlehem, or Ephrem: any of these and other places which I could mention would be vastly preferable to Jerusalem."

*Weird Reveries*

None of the apostles had or indulged such weird reveries. They had no other thought but that of abiding by the appointments of their Master in all things, knowing full well that He was cognizant of the place most suited to the descent of the Holy Spirit. And for yielding to His pleasure in the matter without hesitation and reserve they were munificently remunerated in the end. This is a lesson for those Religious who like to quibble regarding the place to which the superiors assign them for retreat. What was said above regarding the complaints about the time is applicable also to the complaints regarding the place of the retreat. Outside of substantial reasons that here and there warrant the subject in modestly applying for a change of place with reference to her retreat there are many flimsy and merely apparent reasons adduced by self-willed Re-

ligious who are resolved to make retreat not where the superiors bid them, but where they themselves choose to make it. The motives that are decisive in their choice of place for their retreat are usually not the best; nor are they of a nature as to guarantee rich spiritual results from the retreat. These Religious would fare better all round if they forewent their own pleasure and unconditionally followed the superiors' direction in so important a matter.

*A Silent Eloquence*

The place of a retreat can be, as was that in Jerusalem, of great importance with reference to the issue of the retreat. It often has a silent eloquence that is as ingratiating and inveigling as it is potent and irresistible. It may even be more persuasive at times than the very lectures of the retreat-master and the private or public spiritual reading. The cenacle furnishes the best illustration of this. For everyone of the apostles it was hallowed by the most sacred memories and rendered dear by the tenderest associations. In it they had received such bounteous manifestations of God's love for them that there was nothing they might not further expect of Him in the way of His divine munificence. Forty-three days before our Lord charged

them to go there to make their retreat they had been assembled with Him in that consecrated hall for the farewell ceremony of their beloved Master.

*That Memorable Night*

In that memorable night the grandest events of their lives took place, and they were the beneficiaries of the most precious tokens of heaven. There it was that they were privileged to assist at the first Holy Mass that was ever celebrated upon this earth; they received their first Holy Communion from the hands of Jesus Himself; they were ordained priests and, it seems, at least incipiently, consecrated bishops by the Eternal High Priest and the "Shepherd and Bishop" (1 Peter, 2, 25) of their souls. There they listened with rapt attention and devotion to His ineffably beautiful highpriestly prayer and to His resistlessly touching farewell address. In that same holy spot, three days later, they were vouchsafed to see Jesus for the first time after His resurrection in His glorified body, to be breathed on by the Son of God unto the infusion of the Holy Ghost, and to receive God's own power of forgiving the sins of men.

As they now gathered in the same place at the express behest of Jesus all the inspiring

and overpowering remembrances of these glorious incidents vividly came back to them to engender in their bosoms the highest expectations and the most glorious hopes. They very logically said within themselves: "If Jesus, without any distinct promise of favor on His part to that effect, has been so admirably good to us in this sacred hall in the past, what surpassing grand exhibition of His benevolence must He not have in store for us now, after giving us a solemn promise of a most extraordinary favor!"

*The Crowning Gift*

In this expectation they were not to be disappointed. The descent of the Holy Ghost in His fullness upon them was the crowning gift of God to them. Without it all the anterior favors of God would have been practically nullified: with it, however, they rose to infinite proportions and an unbounded capacity for good unto themselves and others. After that blissful event the cenacle was dearer to their hearts and more precious to their minds than ever before. It was invested for them with memories so celestial and impressions so divine that the picture of it remained forever alive in their souls, accompanying them encouragingly and inspiringly throughout all the vicissitudes of their

earthly career. Wherever they were in subsequent days; whatever they did for the Lord and His cause; whatever they suffered; whatever difficulties they encountered; whatever hardships they met with: the remembrance of the cenacle and the blessed outpouring of the Spirit of God upon them never failed to cheer, brace, comfort, and hearten them to the utmost heroism in adversity as well as to the most grateful humility in prosperity.

*The Place Speaks to You*

It may be that the place in which you are now making retreat has for you like memories and similar mental associations. Here it was, perhaps, that you received some of the greatest tokens of God's special love and beneficence towards you. Here you received the holy habit and pronounced the vows of religion whereby you became the spouse of the King of kings by distinct consecration. In addition to these public and inestimable graces that are common to all the Sisters, God bestowed upon you in this hallowed spot some very personal spiritual bounties which overwhelmed you by their magnificence and ravished you by their sweetness. Even as St. Thomas in the cenacle you were privileged, as it were, to touch the wounds

of Jesus in mystic contemplation of His passion, and to put your hand into His open side, close to His Sacred Heart, in ecstatic meditation on His love.

*Entrancing Spiritual Adventures*

All these favors in their full import and blessed results come back to you now, recalling the delicious days of your youthful relish of the Lord and His holy house, as well as the entrancing spiritual adventures of your maturer years. And in view of God's past favors to you in this blessed temple you confidently hope and fervidly expect that now, after He has bidden you to come here to receive a new display of His benignity, He will equal or even exceed His bounties to you in bygone days by the forthcoming expression of His limitless benevolence. In this comforting hope may you not be disappointed.

*You Will Never Forget It*

Then, after this retreat is over, this place will mean more to you than ever before. It will have become more indelibly impressed upon your mind and more lovingly enshrined in your heart. "Never before in my life," you will then be able to say with humble recognition, "did I feel God so near to me;

never did I so much realize how marvelously sweet He can be even on this earth; never did it come home to me in so high a degree what it means to live in God, by God, with God, and for God; never was I so enlivened, stirred, transported, and encouraged by the delicious influence of His Spirit, and animated to give myself to Him more and more and to profess my undying attachment and absolute loyalty to Him, come what may, as in this retreat."

The thought of it will never again leave you. It will be an element of consolation and strength in whatever spiritual situations, temptations, and tribulations may come upon you. Some of you may die soon, very soon; others may grow to be quite old and may still be living fifty or sixty years from now. But even then, a half a century or more from today, they will still remember and distinctly feel the salutary effects—provided they now make it well—of the retreat in which they are now engaged. It will always be in their life an outstanding Pentecost on which they were filled with the Holy Ghost.

*God Is Partial*

As was said in connection with the time of the retreat, that God is more partial to some seasons than others in the dispensation

of His gifts, so it appears, too, that he favors some places before others in the same regard. This seems to be the case for the Church in general, for instance, respecting Lourdes, Loretto, Paray-le-Monial, St. Anne de Beaupre, and other world famous shrines which received and maintain their celebrity mainly through the many miracles or extraordinary bestowals of divine favors occurring there. Prayers seem to be heard there in a quicker and fuller manner than elsewhere. This is doubtless due to the greater faith and livelier hope of the prayers themselves. Yet this faith and hope are again due to the conviction that God somehow favors those places for the easy distribution of His bounties.

*God Hears the Sisters Everywhere*

There is no reason why this consideration should not apply to this holy spot in which you are now making retreat. If God hears the Sisters' prayers everywhere He is inclined to hear them here with a particular readiness and abundance of love in consequence of your stronger faith and more abiding hope, due to your knowledge of God's partiality to this place in the granting of His gifts, of which you have had repeated and convincing evidence since your entrance into religion.

You will be confirmed in this pious belief by reviewing in your mind the Sisters who in past years made retreat in this very place and who are now already enjoying their reward in heaven. Some of them you may have known; others were strangers to you. They laid the foundation or built a great deal of the super-structure of their holiness and glory in the retreats they made where you are now making yours.

*They Were Down and Out*

They then had more or less the same spiritual struggles, doubts, problems, and difficulties that now confront and harass you. They were just as much tempted to discouragement, depression, and pusillanimity as you may now be tempted. They may, at times, have come here to a retreat on a far lower spiritual grade and with much less hope of spiritual betterment and progress than you are now come here.

Yet here it was, in this same place, where God spoke to their heart and gradually or suddenly filled them with the Holy Ghost. If this, then, happened here again and again, in hundreds and perhaps thousands of instances, how can you help trusting that it will also recur in your behalf? The sight of the innumerable crutches and other tokens

left in the Lourdes shrine by such as were cured of their ailments inspires sick or crippled people with an invincible and abiding confidence that they, too, may expect help and relief from above. There is no reason why the spiritual vision of the many Sisters who became saints in retreats made in this place in days past should not have a similar effect upon you.

*He Knew Jesus Was Coming*

In his eagerness to see Jesus Zacheus "climbed up into a sycamore tree, that he might see Him: for He was to pass that way" (Luke, 19, 4). Knowing that Jesus "was to pass that way" made the "chief of the publicans" certain he would see Him. This very certainty raised his hope and whetted his desire to see Jesus. You are, or ought to be, just as sure that the Holy Ghost is going to pass this way, or through this retreat. Jesus Himself promises you as much. This certainty must increase your expectancy of the Holy Spirit and prepare you to give Him a warm welcome.

You must beware, therefore, of allowing the Spirit of Jesus to pass you by unnoticed and unbenefited. He will do this only if you pay no attention to Him and ignore Him as He comes along. How different and how

sad would not the lot of Zacheus have been if, when Jesus came along the way, he would have been preoccupied with other matters so that he would not have been aware of the Savior's passing until it was too late to get any profit from it! In this sense St. Augustine says: "I fear Jesus passing by." It would be equally sad and unfortunate if, while the Holy Ghost breathes through this retreat you would be culpably oblivious of Him, and, as a result, experience none of His divine influence. To forestall so disastrous a fate you must whisper to yourself again and again: "I fear the Holy Spirit passing by."

*The Seventh Day*

Not so long ago a clever and experienced retreat-master, preaching a retreat to priests in an eastern diocese, warned the pastors against starting an argument or getting into an altercation with Sisters on whatsoever question. "Sisters are strong with the Lord," he said. "They will start a novena, and the seventh day you are dead." This statement, of course, caused considerable amusement among the listeners. It brought into relief, however jestingly, the power of a good nun's prayer.

In this retreat, therefore, being so strong with God, each Sister should be able in a

very brief time to restore or, rather, to increase within herself the life of the Spirit of God. Even as Mary, the paragon of virgins consecrated to God, is justly called by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church "the praying omnipotence", so every nun, as a second Mary, can render her prayer so appealing that God cannot but comply with it.

*God's Chosen Place*

The words which God spoke to Solomon of old with reference to the temple apply as well to this place. The Lord, so to speak, declares unto the Sisters in retreat: "I have chosen this place for Myself for a house of sacrifice. If I shut up heaven . . . and My people, upon whom My Name is called, being converted, shall make supplication to Me, and seek out My face, and do penance for their . . . ways: then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sins and will heal their land. My eyes also shall be open, and My ears attentive to the prayer of Him that shall pray in this place. For I have chosen, and have sanctified this place, that My Name may be there forever: and My eyes and My heart may remain there perpetually" (2 Par., 7, 12-16).

# LECTURE IV.

## The Community Retreat

> "*They were all filled with the Holy Ghost*" (Acts, 2, 4).

The manner of the apostles' retreat, which unquestionably had been devised by their divine Master, is described in the words of the Bible: "All these were persevering with one mind in prayer . . . They were all together in one place" (Acts, 1, 14; 2, 1).

The disciples of Jesus, then, made a public or solemn retreat. They made retreat in common. Maybe one or the other, had he had his own choice in the matter, would have preferred to make a private retreat all by himself. He could have remonstrated with our Lord's direction, saying: "Somehow I never do well when I make retreat with others. Their very presence and company distract me and detour my mind into foreign channels and engender strange sentiments in my heart, and start unpleasant impulses in my emotional nature. There are those among my companions who distinctly get on my nerves. Others, even, by their peculiar personal carriage, pose, and mannerisms, provoke me to a temperamental revolt

and fill me with disgust. I cannot help it that I am so constituted. I wish I were different; but the wish does not change matters.

*He Hears Them Sigh*

"Moreover, praying with others is no profit to me. When I hear them sigh or see them panting with devotion it rather distracts and irritates me. I find it harder, too, to observe the external silence when others are about. Whenever I see or meet one or the other I just feel I have to say something to them or chat with them. And as to internal silence in a crowd of others, it is altogether out of the question with me. Their nearness begets in me a brand of thoughts, mental associations, and remembrances of various kinds that are entirely extraneous to the retreat and considerably hamper me in the virtuous pursuit of it.

"The lectures also, which St. Peter, St. John, or one of the others may give, and the public spiritual reading of the Bible handicap me more than they prosper me in the retreat. I do much better when I meditate or read for myself. Hence I beg to be permitted to hie myself into the Cave of the Nativity, in Bethlehem, or some other solitary place and make retreat alone. Then

I can forget the world and creatures completely and commune with God after my soul's desire and to my heart's content in uninterrupted bliss and unalloyed ecstasy."

*They Balk*

The apostles were too normal and sensible and, above all, they had too much reverence and love for Jesus and faith in His direction as to express so odd and singular a wish. They were glad to be together in their retreat for their mutual encouragement and animation in waiting upon the Holy Ghost. The reward was commensurate with their ready obedience. Here they are models for those Religious who, not from necessity—there are those who to their own disappointment and chagrin are actually hindered from making a public retreat and must therefore be satisfied with making one in private—but from sheer capriciousness balk at making retreat in concert with others, and insist that the only way they can make a retreat is when they are absolutely alone.

*They Are Contrary*

Such characters are usually either abnormal, or contrary, or both. Their motives in demanding a private retreat are not always above suspicion. If their abnormality has

not yet become critical, they will do better by opposing its senseless instincts and making retreat with others in spite of their aversion for it than by indulging its promptings and thereby increasing their mental or emotional morbidity. Their act of obedience alone in yielding to the superiors against their feelings will insure a greater fruit of the retreat than any privacy of solitariness could guarantee them.

In this connection I recall the ludicrous instance of a man who said he could not make a retreat with other Catholic men since they would not observe silence nor permit him to observe it; hence he asked to make a private retreat in a religious institution. When he was granted this leave he was seen of his own accord to observe less silence than his hosts who were not in retreat and who wanted to give him every opportunity for its observance. Human nature is often funny, they say, and there are queer people everywhere.

*They Sin in the Retreat*

Others bring an apparently severer charge against the community retreat when they say: "In the one week of the annual retreat I usually commit more sins by uncharitable conversation than I do throughout the entire

rest of the year. I meet companions after a long interval and before we get through telling one another our experiences, adventures, and misadventures on the mission, and our versions of the various Sisters, priests, and others we had to deal with, my conscience stings me with considerable remorse for a number of greater or smaller breaches of charity. I should do better if I stayed away entirely from the public retreat."

It is evident that this charge does not attach to the solemn retreat as such—for there are ever so many Sisters who commit no such sins against charity when they attend a retreat in common—but to the abuse of it perpetrated by weak and, incidentally, disobedient nuns. If they kept the prescribed silence during the retreat, their conscience would remain unseared by violations of charity committed in the course of it.

*Lamentations of Sisters*

Perhaps the best and quickest way to be convinced of the value of a retreat in common is to hear the sincere and touching lamentations of the poor Sisters in inaccessible missionary districts who have for years been bereft of the consolations and other signal benefits of a well-conducted public retreat. Such a retreat is the object of their daily and

fervent prayers for months and years. They say, as it were, to the fortunate nuns who have an annual solemn retreat: "If thou didst know the gift of God!" (John, 4, 10.)

Besides the great merit of obedience accruing to those who, in pursuance of their superiors' directions, take part in a solemn retreat, such a retreat contains several other decided advantages for the participants of it. The public lectures, or talks, or sermons, or conferences of the retreat-master are, if they are listened to with humble attention and docility, a great help towards thorough self-inspection, contrition, and piety in general. They furnish repeated and continuous animation and fervor. The individual retreat-master may not be so eloquent, clever, entertaining, and inspiring as others are, but if he is hearkened to with the proper motive and sufficient concentration by the Sisters, God will use him as His own spokesman in their regard to tell them truths that are highly valuable for their conversion or, relatively, their ulterior perfection and ultimate holiness.

*Poor English*

The great American convert, Orestes Brownson, tells us that the sermon which made the greatest effect on him was a dis-

course preached by a priest who had a pronounced foreign accent, and whose entire sermon hardly had one correct English sentence in it. A telephone apparatus may appear old, worn, shabby, and cheap; and yet the most exhilarating and profitable message may be communicated through it. In the same way God not seldom uses an outwardly unappealing, uninviting, and ungainly speaker in a retreat to convey to an humble and docile Sister a heavenly message fraught with countless blessings for her present and future life.

As to retreat-masters, Sisters will do well if in them they do not look for human oratory of a high and showy character, nor for unusual gifts of entertaining, amusing, and diverting speech. There is a vast difference between being delightfully entertained and thoroughly converted. The imagination is tickled in vain if it is not a way of moving the heart to compunction. The most delicious thrill of the emotions will mean nothing unless it causes the awakening or the increase of the love of God in the soul. And the finest instructions in ascetical or mystical theology are lost if they do not school the will unto the practice of actual virtue.

*The Retreat Master's Ambition*

The ambition of every true retreat-master is, and all good Sisters gladly uphold him in it, humbly to be able to say with St. Paul: "And I, . . . when I came to you, came not in loftiness of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of Christ. For I judged not myself to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ: and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not in the persuasive words of human wisdom, but in showing of the Spirit and power: that your faith might not stand on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1 Cor., 1-5).

*Deaf Sisters*

For various reasons Sisters at times derive no profit whatever from the discourses of the retreat-master. There are those who are afflicted with deafness. If their affliction is not acute they will ask permission to use the pews that are located immediately before the preacher, where they may be able to hear and understand him. If their trouble is grievous, however, they will not expect the speaker to attempt to make them understand him by pitching his voice abnormally high and loud, thereby wearing himself out and

annoying the entire audience the while because of his unnatural and strained effort. They will rather forego the pleasure of hearing the lectures and bear their trial with patience and resignation. God will then speak to their hearts as sweetly and powerfully as if they actually heard His word preached by His minister. It will also not be out of place if, since they cannot hear what is being said by the preacher, they either pray silently during the discourse or read a good spiritual book without undue notice and observation.

Other Sisters receive no benefit from the retreat sermons because for futile reasons, or for no reason at all save their sloth and self-indulgence, they are absent from the sermons whenever the mood seizes them. They thereby not only incur a serious loss themselves, but also cause not a little disedification to others.

*The Dozing Sisters*

There are Sisters, too, who are present at the sermons in the body, but not with their spirit. They doze or sleep while the discourses are being delivered. If their sleep is involuntary and persists against their sincere efforts to shake it off, they have no fault in the matter. They can even turn this

annoying affliction into a source of merit by bearing it humbly and resignedly. Perchance they could forestall the untimely and unwelcome sleep during the lectures by being careful to procure the necessary sleep at night in a sufficient measure or, if this is not feasible for some reason, during the day outside of the lectures, with the required permission.

St. Thomas says that while involuntary sleep at prayer destroys the sweetness, it yet does not nullify the substance or the merit of prayer. With due qualification this applies also to involuntary sleep during the lectures or the spiritual reading. But the directly intended effect of the lectures is evidently lost on those who sleep, wittingly or unwittingly, while the lectures are being delivered. It is needless to add that the nun who culpably sleeps during the retreat lectures, besides forfeiting her own spiritual profit, neither edifies her companions nor enthuses the retreat-master.

*Day-Dreaming Sisters*

Some Sisters, though corporally awake during the lectures, forego all the spiritual profit the lectures might bring them because of their inattention. Their thoughts are

elsewhere, far away from the retreat. They would blush visibly at times, and be not a little embarrassed if their thoughts during the lectures were of a sudden revealed to the audience. As a rule these inattentive Sisters are given to the weakness of day-dreaming. Their thoughts are not sinful in themselves, but they are idle and purposeless. They run along incoherently and aimlessly without method or object. The Sisters in question do not want to make the mental effort required for attention and concentration. As a result the entire discourse of the speaker leaves them without a single thought or impulse towards betterment.

Here it will hardly be necessary to advert to the critical nun whose whole attention is fixed on the manner, language, style, pronunciation, gestures, and poses of the retreat-master. No fault of grammar or diction escapes her. All she remembers when the retreat is over are the real or alleged mistakes of the preacher: which means she let a very gracious visitation of the Holy Spirit go by unused. She would be like the tourist who after his visit to Niagara Falls, the Grand Canyon, or the Swiss Alps carried away no other impression than the remembrance of certain oddities of the guide.

*A Retreat for Cloistered Nuns*

A French Dominican Father related the story that when he was a young priest in France he was appointed by his superior to preach his first retreat to cloistered nuns. He prepared for it very sedulously and painstakingly, entertaining, as he did, a certain indefinable awe for the saintly women whose life was entirely absconded in the Lord and forever and altogether shut off from the world.

When he arrived at the nunnery the chaplain gave him the program of the spiritual exercises, adding that he had planned on a little vacation during the retreat-master's presence and activity in the convent, and that he was leaving after a few moments. He cautioned the friar that, as the nuns were completely cloistered, he would not see any of them, hidden as they were behind the enclosure in the chapel; but he should not allow this to nonplus him at all, but he should speak his lecture with as much fervor and eloquence as though he saw them in person. They would be there all right, he said, even if he had no visual evidence of it, and they would follow him with as much attention, humility, docility, and responsiveness as any of his hearers had ever listened to him.

The Father thanked him for this friendly counsel and assured him he would act on it. They parted amicably, wishing one another godspeed for their vacation or retreat work, respectively.

*The Preacher Waxed Warm*

The retreat began with the first lecture set at two o'clock in the afternoon. After a terse immediate preparation—for the young retreat-master understood that a good beginning of a retreat is half the retreat—the pious friar went into the chapel and immediately, at two o'clock, began his introductory address. Soon he waxed quite warm with apostolic ardor and he was carried away into unwonted rhapsodies of sacred eloquence, speaking, as he thought, with an unction and persuasiveness he never suspected he was capable of.

When he finished his initial discourse he felt certain of victory. He knew that he had made a most favorable impression and that the success of the retreat was practically assured. The effort taxed him, however. He was perspiring profusely. When he got to his room he used a towel to relieve himself of the perspiration. Then he fell into a reclining chair to rest upon what he considered his laurels.

*A Rap at the Door*

Presently he heard a gentle rap at the door. One of the extern nuns was there to tell him that it was three o'clock and the nuns were waiting in the choir for the introductory lecture of the retreat which was scheduled to be given at that hour. Completely stunned the good Father exclaimed that he had just given the lecture at two o'clock, according to the program given him by the chaplain. But she said that the chaplain must have made a mistake. The hour was three o'clock, and the nuns were not in the choir while he was preaching at two. He then consented to repeat his sermon, making up his mind at the same time that in future he would be sure that his and the nuns' hour-plans would coincide exactly as to the time of the retreat lectures.

*Asleep in the Conference*

Maybe the observation would not be amiss here, that whenever the Sisters are culpably distracted or even asleep during a retreat conference, the retreat-master is hardly better off in reality than was the Dominican Father in the story. As far as any practical benefit to his audience—if it is an audience—is concerned, his efforts are wasted. But the one who would be most slighted in this

procedure would be our Lord Himself Whose designs to give messages of His love and salvation to His consecrated spouses through the retreat-master's sermons would thus be frustrated. To this we must add, however, that it will hardly ever or never happen that an entire assembly of Sisters will at one and the same time be so oblivious of their spiritual welfare as to exhibit such indifference to the word of God.

*Pharisaical Sisters*

In a worse way than any yet mentioned, the fruit of the retreat sermons is lost by those Sisters who are all attention while they are delivered, but who apply what they hear to others instead of to themselves. They not only defraud themselves of considerable profit, but they not rarely are guilty of sin, due to their rash judgments and uncharitable suspicions. They are usually proud, conceited, haughty, and cold. They are members of the sect whose spokesman our Lord described as saying with nauseating self-complacency: "O God, I give Thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men!" (Luke, 18, 11.) The result of their retreat is also classified by our Savior, declaring that the Pharisee left the presence of God unjustified: "because everyone that

exalteth himself shall be humbled" (*ib.*, 14). The Publican who in God's presence was centered on himself and his own sins exclusively is always a favorite model for a good and sensible nun in retreat, for "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (*ib.*).

*Lecture Notes*

As a rule it is inadvisable for Sisters to take down notes during the lectures. It disturbs, or, at least, distracts the other Sisters, and not seldom annoys the speaker. After the lecture it is wise to meditate devoutly on what one has heard and, if one can do it without inconvenience, to jot down the more striking parts of the discourse for future re-reading whereby the wholesome feelings, aspirations, and resolutions are easily revived unto the soul's consolation, delight, and stimulation.

A further distinct advantage of the public retreat over the private one lies in the salutary influence of the crowd itself upon each individual member of the retreat. The powerful factor of solidarity comes distinctly into play, by which one is for all and all are for each one. Every Sister brings and with all the other Sisters pools her share of fervor, devotion, and zeal towards a good retreat; and the accumulation of this general pooling

again redounds to the substantial furtherance of each individual Sister. This is but an exemplification of the adage: In unity there is strength. Mergers are today considered to be most effective in business and other departments of civic life. When properly employed and duly exploited they are equally efficacious in the religious and spiritual life. The solemn retreat is in a way just such a merger.

*Sisters Go A-Fishing*

Our Lord seems to refer to the benefit of it when He says: "Where there are two or three gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt., 18, 20). When, after our Lord's resurrection, Peter one day said to the other disciples: "I go a-fishing. They say to him: We also come with thee. And they went forth and entered into the ship" (John, 21, 3). The final result was they caught an unexpectedly large number of fish. If a Sister fishes alone, so to say, or makes retreat alone, she may perhaps catch little in the way of spiritual fruit: whereas if she makes a retreat in common she will likely make a large haul of substantial profit.

In a private retreat is not seldom verified the proverb: "Woe to him that is alone: for,

when he falleth, he hath none to lift him up" (Eccl., 4, 10). If a nun in a private retreat grows weary, disgusted, and pusillanimous in the pursuit of her retreat, there is no one to encourage her and buoy her up: while in a public retreat, due to the powerful and well nigh irresistible element of crowd psychology, whenever a Sister inclines to weaken in her attention and application to the retreat and its exercises, she will be animated and stimulated anew by the example of the other Sisters. There is, as it were, a strong current of devotion and piety there which carries every Sister along with it unless she positively and stubbornly refuses to surrender herself to its force.

*'Tis Hard to be Sad*

It is hard to be sad in a crowd in which everyone else is glad; and it is not easy to be glad in a multitude every member of which is sad. Similarly it is difficult to remain indevout, cold, and indifferent in an assembly in which everybody else is devout, ardent, and enthusiastic; and it is hardly possible not to be contrite and God-loving in a gathering the very atmosphere of which is highly charged with a hatred and sorrow for sin and a most intense and burning love of God. By contributing her share to heighten

and enrich this mystic atmosphere of genuine piety every Sister in her turn will increase its vitalizing power regarding herself. By doing her part in rendering the current of religiousness strong and resistless in the retreat she herself will be borne along by it with greater joy and gratification.

*Woman Is Ambitious*

By nature woman is very ambitious and endowed with a spirit of keen rivalry with the members of her sex. We have evidence of this in every department of feminine life in the world. One woman wants to outdo the other in appearance, clothes, habitation, jewelry, furs, automobiles; in social superiority and love conquests; in practically every profession of public life; and last, but by no means least, in athletics and aviation. Ever so many women aim to be the first to swim a great distance, to fly an unprecedented height or range for women, and to endure the longest in the air of all women. This ambition is not bad as long as it is used sensibly and moderately. But that woman is wisest who exploits this gift of nature to her in the highest fields and noblest endeavors. The greatest and most worthwhile pursuit any woman, even as any man, can engage in is the conquest of herself, or himself, relatively.

*The Highest Average*

In the retreat you are bent on rendering this conquest of yourself definite and final. You are in the retreat for no other purpose. Nothing will help you more towards the realization of this ideal aim than the development and exertion of a strong and relentless emulation among all the Sisters taking part in it. Each one must be bent, with as much or even more alacrity and determination than secular women exhibit in any of their contests, on getting the highest average and best record of all in the conquest of herself. The Sisters will therefore vie with one another in trying to be the most humble, obedient, pure, truth-loving, charitable, poor in spirit, unselfish, pious, zealous, self-sacrificing, and God-loving of all. In this line of endeavor competition can be neither too keen nor too long maintained.

*The Better Gifts*

St. Paul exhorted the first Christians to practice this holy rivalry, saying: "Be zealous for the better gifts" (1 Cor., 12, 31). The better gifts for a nun are not health, reputation, and fame; the patronage of superiors, the love of subjects, general popularity inside and outside the convent; promotions to high offices, dignity, prestige,

and power. These are good gifts of God in their way, and may be turned to a good account for their possessors as well as for others. Yet they are not the better gifts for the acquisition of which St. Paul wants his disciples to compete with one another.

These better gifts are compunction of heart and sorrow for sin; humility of spirit and lowliness of mind; an eager and unquenchable desire to love God more from day to day and to do His Will in all things; an insatiable ambition to be nailed to the cross forever with Jesus Christ in the patient and cheerful suffering of the ills and pains of life as they are sent to us or are permitted to come over us by God.

*Open and Free to All*

These are the things in which the competition is equally open and free to all. This is a competition in which no one is unfairly preferred or discriminated against; in which the reward is always dispensed according to absolute fairness and unimpeachable equity; in which failure cannot ensue but through the fault of the one who is competing; in which the victory achieved wins an imperishable crown. Oh, if nuns in general would but rival one another in the pursuit of the better things as keenly as they emulate one another

in the merely good, indifferent, or even questionable things of religious life, then convents would be harboring not nearly so many novices and under-graduates as post-graduates, bachelors, masters, and doctors in perfection and sanctity.

A Jewish gentleman who is interested in building-associations told one of our Fathers some time ago that for a while their organization prospered but little. But as soon as they started to have annual conventions the business at once increased in volume and profits. At these conventions the members exchanged views and experiences; proposed methods, and discussed problems; one learned from, and in his turn taught, the other; the general interest and enthusiasm gripped and inflamed every one present, and charged him with new initiative, spirit of enterprise, hope in his cause, and endurance in his work. In a silent, but not less potent way the annual retreat exerts the same influence upon those who take part in it.

*The Spur of Publication*

In secular meets and races the emulation of the contenders is stimulated and elevated to its highest pitch through their being aware that the results of their combat will be published to the world and will become a matter

of general knowledge. Publication conveys a powerful spur to human ambition and activity. Pastors tell us, for instance, that their church collections are always considerably larger if it is understood that the contributions of the givers are to be duly listed and published to the parish. No doubt the same result would be achieved in the spiritual domain if the corresponding publication were possible.

Speaking after a human fashion, it would be interesting and no doubt stimulating if, let us say, at the end of each retreat God would somehow reveal the run made in the race for heaven and holiness—St. Paul calls it a race (2 Tim., 4, 7)—by each individual nun. It would be illuminating to all and, relatively, surprising or disappointing. At this revelation the words of Jesus would come to mind: "So shall the last be first and the first last" (Matt., 20, 16).

*They Exchange Places*

Sisters who, in the vanity of their self-estimation, consider themselves leading the race, would be found to be lagging far behind: whereas others who, in the humility of their self-depreciation, are convinced they are making up the rear of the procession, would be away up in front. A Sister who has

been a long time in the convent might be far behind a novice of yesterday. It would be observed, too, that some Sisters who a year ago were the vanguard of the community in perfection and sanctity are now much behind the ones in the middle: while others, again, who last year seemed not to be able to drag themselves along at all in trying to keep pace with the Sisters on the narrow path to heaven, are now far in advance of those who were wont to pity them for their mediocrity and apparent disability.

*Our Final Percentage*

For reasons of His own God makes no such revelation at our annual retreats: at which all of us no doubt sincerely rejoice. But He will reveal our final run or grade of percentage to all the world on the last day. The consciousness of this manifestation ought to stimulate us to the acquisition of virtue at least as much as the ephemeral and local publication has a tendency to spur ordinary secular contestants to the utmost exertion of their best and most latent powers.

In reference to this matter, St. Paul says: "One is the glory of the sun, another the glory of the moon, and another the glory of the stars. For star differeth from star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the

dead" (1 Cor., 15, 41, 42). On earth people like to be known as "stars" in their respective professions. But these earthly stars have a way of growing pale and vanishing fast. A new star soon eclipses the old one, to be eclipsed by a supervening one in his turn. The "stars" of God, however, or His saints, "shall shine, and shall run to and fro like sparks among the reeds" (Wisdom, 3, 7), and, as our Lord declares, far from ever losing their luster or their prominence, "then shall the just shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt., 13, 43).

*The Star of Her Community*

But as there will be a difference between the saints in glory, even as there is between the sun and the moon, or among the stars, it is perfectly in keeping with virtuous ambition for a Sister to aim to be one of the most resplendent, yea, the very first and brightest star of her community on the day of revelation and in the kingdom of God. If in convents we had more emulation in the field of solid holiness and less in the realms of merely human preferments, distinctions, and power, it would make for a substantial increase in general happiness and contentment, as well as in virtue and sanctity.

Some time ago a scientist of note made the startling assertion that the average man uses but one-fifth of his brain power; very few men use one-half of theirs; hardly anyone goes beyond one-half in the exploitation of his cerebral capacity. Whatever objective foundation there may or may not be to this assertion it is not our province to discuss. But maybe as regards the striving after holiness it is true that most Sisters are using but about one-fifth of their given natural and supernatural energy relative to it; some may be using one-half; those who go beyond this mark are, thank God, not exactly scarce in all communities. If you were distinctly and publicly told by God the precise ratio of your individual striving after perfection, would the figure be something to be proud or ashamed of before the retreat crowd?

*A Unique Recipe of Sanctity*

St. Anthony of Egypt had a unique and simple way of becoming a saint. He believed in and applied the psychological truth that the examples of virtue of the living and the present are ordinarily more potent than those of the dead and the absent. He therefore had his eye on the virtuous conduct of the other anchorites of the desert. Whenever he noticed that one was excelling in a certain

virtue he at once undertook to equal or even to outdo him in that very virtue. By and by he soon acquired a galaxy of splendid virtues by this ingenious process and became the great saint we now revere in him.

*Living and Present Saints*

A good way to render the retreat effective is to imitate the saint's example. During the retreat you will hear and read of various saints in the lectures and the spiritual reading. No one can gainsay the strong impression their example makes on a receptive mind and heart. But even more than by the examples of dead and absent saints can the Sisters be stimulated to saintliness by the examples of the living and present saints they have about them on every side in the retreat. Practically each Sister is conspicuous for some virtue. In one you must admire her humility and lowliness of spirit; in another her patience and resignation in suffering; in a third, her ready and complete forgiveness of injuries; in a fourth, her outstanding devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament; in a fifth, her obedience, submissiveness, and reverence for her ecclesiastical and religious superiors, etc. There is no religious virtue for which you do not find an enviable and inspiring pattern among them. If, then, you follow St.

Anthony's method and set about to emulate and, if possible, to surpass each Sister in her outstanding virtue, you will be not a little advanced on the road of perfection when the retreat is over. You will be surprised, to boot, how much genuine sanctity you can find among your own Sisters when you earnestly look for it.

*She Asks for Permissions*

After the manner of the saints you will say: "If others can do it, why not I? If Sister M. is so conscientious about holy poverty, and is personally satisfied with the bare necessities, and cheerfully submits to the humiliating ceremony of asking for the superior's permission required by the vow, why can I not do the same? If Sister N. would rather die than violate holy obedience in any way whatsoever, say by mailing a letter without the superior's leave, prescribed by the constitution, why can I not observe the sacred vow in an equal degree? If Sister X. has not been known through an entire year ever to have irreverently or uncharitably criticized her superiors, or subjects, or fellow Sisters, why can I not master my tongue in like manner? Sister Z. entered the convent years after me; but in real virtue and sanctity she has outstripped me by far; and this in

the face of much greater odds than I had to contend with. Why must I suffer this humiliating disparity? I am minded to put an end to it at once, here and now. 'It is time, O Lord, to do' (Ps. 118, 126)".

*She Concentrates on Her Own Faults*

Another method, correlative to the foregoing, may also produce splendid results in a retreat. It is, of course, a basic principle of every retreat, that the Sister who wants to profit by it must concentrate on her own faults and apply what she hears, reads, and meditates to herself. Still, in religious communities, human nature being as human as it is, one cannot help being aware of certain patent and undeniable faults of individuals. They have been made the subject of general observation and comment again and again; hence it does not necessarily bespeak uncharitableness for a nun to take cognizance of them for a good purpose.

*She Cannot Hold Her Tongue*

What I mean is this: You are aware that the Sisters you have been and are living with have their faults. They do not deny it. You also have your faults. You own up to it. Now you have been hearing Sisters say of another Sister, and perhaps you joined in the

comment, without any uncharitableness on the part of anyone: "It is too bad that Sister A., who is such an excellent and lovable Sister in many ways, cannot control that tongue of hers, but through the looseness and irresponsibility of it is sure to get herself and others into hot water again and again. If she could only hold her tongue, what an asset she would be to the community!" Or they say: "What a pity that Sister B., with her splendid talents and charming personality, spoils what good she does or might do through her opiniatedness and untractableness. She will not be ruled by any superior. She will either have things her way, or there will be no way, as far as she is concerned."

*Sister Gadabout*

Or the nuns exclaim in sympathetic desperation: "How sad that Sister C. who, because of her unusual cleverness and eminent gifts, could be so powerful a help to the school or hospital is so restless and such an everlasting gadabout. No one can keep her at home and on duty. She finds a thousand pretexts to go hither and thither. And what is worse, she has a hankering to retail the personal and domestic secrets of the Sisters and their government to the

clergy or lay people without necessity. She has a weakness for the attention, favor, and friendship of priests, doctors, or other professional men. She does not even shrink from the pretense of wanting to go to confession merely to see or meet a certain priest for whom her sentiment is inordinate and troublesome if it is not sinful and disedifying. All in all she causes herself and her patrons and friends not a little discomfiture and embarrassment."

*She Is Too Clever*

Then there is Sister D. on whom the nuns pass this judgment: "She is admittedly clever and a veritable expert at her work. In truth, she has no equal in her particular ability among the Sisters. But her very strength constitutes her greatest weakness. Because she is so successful at her work she overdoes it and is altogether absorbed by it to the evident detriment, if not the loss of the spirit of prayer. Although she is not officially exempt or excused, she is seldom, if ever, present at the community exercises. She thereby disedifies the others while she harms herself. After all, what will it profit her to be the best teacher, nurse, or executive in the world, if she thereby loses her soul?"

*This Book Is For All*

Since this book is written for all Religious, superiors as well as subjects, it would hardly be fair to advert to the faults of the latter without paying attention to the shortcomings of the former. I beg to premise, however, that whatever is said in this book about superiors, whether it be favorable or unfavorable, applies in its measure to all superiors; hence not only to general, provincial, or local superiors, but also to the superiors of schools, and hospitals, and of the various departments, class-rooms, floors, and wards of them, as well as to the Sisters who in some cloistral capacity, inferior to the local superiorship, have Sisters under them. Then, too, what is said may be relatively applied not only to those who are actually superiors in the present time, but also to those who have been superiors, and even to those, too, who may some day be superiors. Viewed in this light the strictures will apply in some way to all the Sisters and bid them take to heart the words of Jesus: "Physician, heal thyself" (Luke, 4, 23).

*She Betrays Secrets*

The Sisters, then, have perhaps animadverted thus: "Our local superior, Sister E., would be an ideal superior in every way if

she did not have the tendency to betray the secrets committed to her through her office and by the Sisters. She cannot keep the contents of the Sisters' letters to herself for anything in the world. Nor is a Sister sure, if she tells her something in the strictest confidence, that one or the other Sister, who are closer to and more intimate with the superior than they ought to be, will not find it out directly or indirectly and peddle it to the others sooner or later. Even the pastor and the assistants, or the chaplains of the institution, hear things from her regarding the individual Sisters or the community in general which should never be told them, or any other non-member of the community, under any consideration."

*A Super-Sister*

Or the Sisters opine, as follows: "Sister F., our superior, has not her equal in the community when there is question of administrative and executive ability, and of maintaining cloistral discipline in all its purity and integrity. Her weakness is, however, and it is altogether too bad that she has it: she takes herself entirely too seriously. She acts as though the community and its appointments were for her to do with just as she likes without being accountable to anyone.

Hence her absolute and independent manner of dispensing the offices, dignities, and honors of the community. She somehow feels because of her standing and success that she is, so to say, a super-Sister, and personally above the ordinary run of Sisters. This renders her intolerably jealous of her dignity and the homage and obsequiousness the Sisters owe her. She is sensitive to the least real or fancied injury to her person in thought, word, or deed, by commission or omission, and is somehow never able to step out of her official role for her own and the Sisters' wholesome relaxation, but always poses in all the splendor and power of her office as superior. Unconsciously, yet very pronouncedly, by her pose and carriage, she places herself upon a pedestal to be adored and made over as an idol; not realizing that by that very fact she plainly reveals her feet of clay."

*The Sisters' Servant*

It is a well-known saying of Abraham Lincoln, who is known for his good common sense, that no person is good enough to be the master of another. If a superior is master of the Sisters, this is not due to any natural superiority she possesses over them—for some of her subjects may be superior to her

in native gifts—but because she is temporarily the stewardess and representative of God with regard to her subjects. This means, according to our Lord's words, that she is to be the servant of the Sisters.

The more she bears this in mind and acts accordingly, the happier she will render both the Sisters and herself. She will also remember to her profit that far from craving honors and obsequious demonstrations from her subjects she will do better by being animated by the spirit of Jesus Who, "when He knew that they would come to take Him by force and make Him king, fled again into the mountain, Himself alone" (John, 6, 15).

*The Power Behind the Throne*

The Sisters may also comment in this wise: "Our superior is as gentle as a saint and as sweet as an angel. She could not willingly hurt anyone for the life of her. But her deplorable weakness is, she does not stand on her own feet. One of her subjects, who has a strong will and a scheming disposition, and who is no stranger to unworthy intrigue if she conceives it will serve her selfish purposes, has her completely under her dominion. This unworthy subject is unfortunately the power behind the throne and, through the superior, manages things to suit herself.

This naturally displeases the Sisters and provokes them at least to interior rebellion. It is hard to serve two masters: an open and a concealed one: one who is master in name and by authentic appointment, but not in reality; and another who is master not in name and by a just title, but in fact, through her unwarranted assumption and impudent ambition."

*The Cult of Pets*

Or the Sisters may sigh more or less openly: "How wonderful our superior would be, if she were not addicted so strongly to the cult of pets, and if she did not play favorites among the Sisters so recklessly and blatantly. Her unfair partiality insults the instinct of justice and fair play in the Sisters, and turns them more and more against her and her administration. Her very partisanship begets the cliques, factions and particular friendships which are one of the greatest banes of a religious community, and the source of universal discontentment, disgust, and eventual revolt. Although everyone else perceives the menace of her ill-advised policy, she is not and, it seems, she does not want to become, aware of it."

*Her Conduct Versus Her Words*

Finally the Sisters may regretfully sigh: "Our superior could not be more dear, kind, and considerate. But all her admonitions in her talks or circular letters to the nuns regarding the faithful and punctilious upkeep of the daily cloistral exercises of piety mean nothing and have no effect whatever as long as she herself belies them by her own neglect of the very exercises she professes to rate so highly and consider so necessary. It is a plain case of example speaking louder than words."

*An Inspiration to the Sisters*

Other Sisters, again, reasonably lament in this wise: "Our dear Superior is a perfect model of piety and religious observance in every way. She never neglects or comes late to a single cloistral exercise. Her example is a veritable inspiration. She takes the lead in everything that pertains to conventual regularity and discipline.

"But, alas, there are some Sisters who do not follow her lead, and who are not guided by her example. From mere sloth and heedlessness they forego the cloistral exercises without scruple and remorse, to the distinct annoyance and disedification of the other nuns. The superior somehow, being

misled by her ill-advised goodness of heart, either does not note or she generously condones the misconduct of said Sisters to their own and others' detriment. She is easily satisfied by their flimsy excuses or artful pretexts, or she is too timid or easy-going to call them to an account for their habitual infringement of the regular observance.

*She Has Eyes and Sees Not*

"As a superior, she is a sad replica, in a religious and moral way, of the idols which were of silver and gold, indeed, but of which the Bible says: 'They have mouths and speak not: they have eyes and see not. They have ears and hear not: they have noses and smell not. They have hands and feel not; they have feet and walk not: neither shall they cry out through their throat' (Ps. 113, 5-7). By her inaction she is allowing the discipline of the convent to weaken and the spirit of the order to deteriorate."

*The Octopus of Scrupulosity*

Again the Sisters may confabulate in this fashion: "Sister M. would be a veritable saint if she were not chained and fettered and hampered all round in her flight up the mount of perfection by the dreadful, gloomy,

and forbidding octopus of scrupulosity. What a brilliant mind she has! What a fine intuition! What a sense of religious delicacy and spiritual refinement! How noble her impulses! How unselfish her endeavors! How heroic and sublime her aspirations! Yet all her splendid parts are restrained, dampened, benumbed, and paralyzed by the deadening influence of the silly and fatuous scrupulosity that completely possesses and obsesses her. If she could but assert her better self against it by becoming truly and unconditionally docile and obedient to her spiritual director, and trusting implicitly with childlike confidence in God's mercy and love: what an inspiration her personality and example would be!"

*A Pertinent Reflection*

You no doubt have heard the Sisters pass these or similar criticisms on the conduct of other nuns. If you have good sense you will now, in the retreat, make this pertinent reflection: Since I am no different from the general run of Sisters there can be no question but that the Sisters have made or are still making similar sinister and deprecatory remarks with reference to myself. I must inquire by a thorough self-inspection what

they might be. And when I find out what is held against me I will do all I can to remedy it and by the contrary virtuous conduct and wise behavior I shall be careful to "give no occasion to the adversary to speak evil" (1 Tim., 5, 14) of me. You will be encouraged to this the more when you reflect upon the good fortune of those Sisters who are known either suddenly or gradually to have rid themselves of noticeable faults that stood in the way of their religious perfection.

*He Disguised Himself*

We read of the eminent Roman general, Germanicus, that, to ascertain the verdict of his soldier subjects regarding his person and conduct, he disguised himself as a common soldier and mingled with his men freely and familiarly, drawing them out cleverly to discuss the virtues and faults of their general. When he heard them pointing out what they considered a foible or shortcoming of their general, he examined his conscience as to the truth of their judgment and, if he found it correct, he at once set about rectifying his mistakes. Thus he became a truly great man.

A nun cannot disguise herself in a similar manner regarding her fellow Sisters in order to explore their minds regarding herself.

Yet, by a rigid and impartial self-examination in the retreat she will be able to get the same results, respectively, as Germanicus got through his resourceful ruse.

*They Have Gone to Heaven*

Until now we have been considering the advantages a nun can derive by judicious, charitable, and profitable reflections on the present members of her community. It is worthy of notice that the absent ones, they who have already gone to heaven, as well as they who have forfeited their vocation and apostatized from the religious life and perhaps from the faith, can also supply the nun in retreat with salutary and effective considerations.

As among the saints in heaven she has no difficulty in spying in her imagination certain Sisters of her community who resembled her much in disposition, trials, temptations, and difficulties: so she easily notes that the Sisters who grossly defaulted in their holy vocation, differed little from her in the same characteristics. Hence, while she aims at being stimulated to high fervor by the former, she exploits the sad fate of the latter as a wholesome deterrent against tepidity and laxity of conduct.

*She Is Warned*

After the example of the apostles, who in their retreat no doubt revolved the apostasy of Judas in their minds, considering the causes that initiated, developed, and brought it to a head; and resolved that, with the grace of God, the same fate should not overtake them: the nun in retreat meditates on the fatal end of her unfortunate Sisters, and diagnoses the causes that were responsible for their disaster: such as the dallying with the occasion of sin; the non-compliance with the counsels and directions of the superiors and spiritual directors; the overweening self-confidence which made them expose themselves to danger unnecessarily; the neglect of prayer, insincerity, hypocrisy, and the like: and she is minded once for all, at any cost, to obviate these causes in order by all means to escape their lethal effect.

*It Compromises the Sisters*

Finally, there is this advantage of a public retreat over a private one inasmuch as it in a way mutually compromises the participants in a good sense. It commits them to the maintenance of the godly and fervent behavior they have assumed before their companions in the retreat. Their self-respect and deference to others will warn

them not to fall back into the former careless habits and to yield again to the propensities which they so resolutely and rather openly repudiated in the retreat. They are swayed by a healthy and virtuous human respect. They dread to expose themselves before the Sisters, who witnessed their piety, compunction, and fervor in the retreat, to the reproach hurled at the Galatians by St. Paul in the words: "O senseless Galatians, who hath bewitched you that you should not obey the truth: before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been set forth, crucified among you? . . . Are you so foolish that, whereas you began in the Spirit, you would now be made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so great things in vain?" (Gal., 3, 1-4). They prefer to follow the example of the Psalmist and say: "O Lord, . . . Thou hast broken my bonds. I will sacrifice to Thee the sacrifice of praise: . . . I will pay my vows to the Lord in the sight of all his people: in the courts of the house of the Lord, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem" (Ps. 115, 16-18).

# LECTURE V.

## One Heart and One Soul.—Retirement

> "*They were all filled with the Holy Ghost*" (Acts, 2, 4).

The bible briefly describes the retreat attitude of the apostles, saying: "All these were persevering with one mind in prayer" (Acts, 1, 14). It would not have benefited the disciples of Jesus a particle to have been "all together in one place" (Acts, 2, 1), if they had not been there "with one mind". Their being unanimous in waiting and sighing for the Holy Spirit, and their having no dissensions or antipathies among them, was a strong bid for the descent of the Spirit of Jesus upon them. It was much more material that "the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul" (Acts, 4, 32), than that they were together merely in the body. The latter circumstance would have meant nothing if it had not been vitalized by the former.

### *United We Stand*

In a community retreat of Sisters it is equally paramount that all the Sisters who take part in it be of "one mind", not only in desiring and pining for the Holy Ghost,

but also regarding their mutual relations of sisterly harmony and love. They must have but "one heart and one soul" in the way of mutual goodwill and concord. To effect this each Sister must dismiss definitely from her mind every recent or old feeling of injury, resentment, and unforgiveness against the Sisters or anyone else. If one wilful sentiment of grievous rancor or unforgiveness is allowed to survive in a Sister's heart, that alone will be, as long as it endures, an insuperable barrier against the advent of the Holy Ghost to her.

*They Never Forget*

There are Sisters, alas, who are temperamentally unfortunate and weak in charity, and who can keep the memory of an injury, real or imaginary, alive in their minds for years and years. They never allow the wound to get scarred and disappear, but they continue to irritate and renew it by rehearsing the injury in their recollection, and even dwelling on it in their conversation, with periodic frequency. They never will forget nor will they ever get over it, as they say, how they have been maltreated by this or that superior, or subject, or fellow Sister years ago, or quite recently, as the case may be; and they derive a visible, albeit an un-

enviable and dishonorable gratification from their vivid remembrance of something it is very much to their interest in every way to forgive and to forget.

*She Cleans Her Slate*

A wise and virtuous Sister does the latter always, but especially in the very beginning of the annual retreat she is intent on being absolutely of one mind with all the Sisters, and on banishing everything that may in any degree smack either of uncongeniality, incompatibility, or a lack of sympathy with the community at large, or of wilful dislike, aversion, irreconciliation, or vindictiveness against any Sister whatsoever. She makes a clean slate of all the grievances she has ever received from the Sisters, without insisting on any further obligation of apology, retractation, or atonement on their part; and she hopes they deal with her in the same generous manner.

There is no stronger way of attracting the Holy Ghost than this heroic and absolute forgiveness of injuries, recent as well as ancient, and the unrestrained spirit of sisterly love and union that is the result of it. If the annual retreat had no other effect but the complete restoration of perfect harmony

and love among the Sisters, this of itself would be a sufficient justification of and an ample reward for it.

*Do Not Be a Slacker*

What has been said of the necessity of dismissing all voluntary thoughts and feelings of bitterness and revenge must be applied, too, to wilful sentiments of jealousy and envy, as well as to feelings of disloyalty to and estrangement from the community, all of which also hinder a Sister from being of one mind, one heart, and one soul, with the other Sisters in retreat.

It furthermore comprises, although in a different way, culpable thoughts and imaginations of undue scrupulosity which, if they are freely nurtured and indulged, render it impossible for their subject to be of one mind with the other Sisters, and to be focused on the expectancy of the Holy Ghost. The scrupulous Sister is so engaged and troubled by her idle fears, weird doubts, and uncanny misgivings, that the Holy Ghost gets little, if any, of her attention. The result of this will be, if she does not manfully resist, as much as in her lies, the attack and progress of her mental or emotional malady, that the Holy Ghost will pass her by, "for the Holy

Spirit of discipline . . . will withdraw Himself from thoughts that are without understanding" (Wisdom, 1, 5).

Whereas, if, as she has been told to do by her spiritual director, she summarily and definitely dismisses all her scruples from her mind at the very start of the retreat, she will experience what the Apostle refers to in the words: "Do not therefore lose your confidence which hath a great reward. For patience is necessary for you: that, doing the will of God, you may receive the promise. For yet a little and a very little while, and He that is to come will come and will not delay" (Hebr., 10, 35-37).

*The Seclusion Was Long*

The remaining in the cenacle behind locked doors for ten entire days no doubt involved for the apostles considerable discomfort, inconvenience, and self-restraint. Ever and again one or the other felt the urge to go out in the open and saunter freely about the city for distraction and diversion. But they gladly endured the hardship imposed upon them in view of the grand reward which was in the offing for them. The sacrifice was not worth attending to in comparison with the gift of the Holy Spirit that was to be the reward of it.

Their seclusion from the world gave the apostles the occasion and leisure and, doubt-

less too, the inclination to review their past conduct, get the proper perspective of it, and resolve upon suitable measures for its rightful readjustment in the future. Thus, for example, did Peter ponder over his denial of Christ and the circumstances that led up to it; Thomas similarly rehearsed in his mind his humiliating disbelief in the resurrection; and all the apostles mentally went over their behavior which savored of a lack of loyalty or wholehearted attachment to Jesus during His hours of trial.

*A Time for Review*

For you also the retreat, with its prolonged period of seclusion and religious confinement, will not be a slight ordeal. Nature will often urge you to get out, away from the retreat routine, to disport yourself and move about easily without let or hindrance. But if you have your eye on the large and liberal spiritual reward in store for you the isolation imposed upon you by the retreat, far from chafing and fretting you, will soothe and delight you. It will also give you the precious opportunity of passing in review all the incidents and conjunctures of your life in religion since the last retreat, and getting the correct viewpoint of your particular situation and environment in the mission to which you

have been or are assigned, of its special demands and influences upon you, and your reactions to them.

*Distance Is Valuable*

In your actual field of work, and while you are engaged with the performance of your ordinary duties, you are hardly in as good a position to rate the entire situation so correctly and justly as when you are at some distance from it and temporarily disengaged from the vocational obligations, your discharge of which you are desirous of evaluating. To take in a beautiful landscape and absorb all its grandeur in the way of proportion, harmony, and variety, one must not be too close upon it; similarly to make an equitable appraisal of your position and whatever is connected with it in a favorable or unfavorable way, it is good to view it from afar, and with plenty of leisure, as the retreat qualifies you to do. Things that at close range do not seem so bad not seldom appear quite reprehensible when they are viewed from a distance and away from the sinister influences that tend to disguise or palliate their malice to the person involved in them. Other things that appear to be very disagreeable and quite intolerable in actual contact take on an entirely different aspect

when they are observed from a vantage point farther away, in connection with all their surroundings and various relations, and without the bias begot by the hostile factors in close proximity with them. In the same way it happens in not a few instances that what seems most precious and desirable when one is close is found, when one is removed from it, not to have nearly all the fascination attributed to it.

*A Perilous Infatuation*

Wise parents are known at times to send their sons and daughters to a boarding school at a distance from home in order to wean them away from what they consider a perilous infatuation. The plan works. The psychological principle expressed by the popular adage: "Out of sight, out of mind," has cured many a lovesick young man or young lady. For them this removal from the scene of their peril, and far away from the object causing it, is in more cases than not the only safety. Absence makes the heart grow cold. Present companions enchant it at the expense of the absent ones. I am aware that other adages seem to say the contrary to the above, for instance: "Distance lends enchantment to the view," and, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." While they also contain an

amount of truth, it seems we should say, by way of compromise between them, that whether distance will have the one effect or the other in a given case will depend finally on the will of the party concerned. He can throw his strength either way, and the side to which he throws it will have the decision.

*Sisters Are Human*

Sisters are as human as anyone and therefore they are under the same psychological influences as the rest of mankind. It may consequently happen in their life also that a Sister is spiritually imperiled by an actual or a menacing inordinate attachment to some person in or outside the convent, of the same or the other sex, or to some place, occupation, amusement, or something else. As long as she is in the immediate radius of the spell which the object in question exercises upon her, she will not easily succeed in duly measuring her fondness for it, and the danger to her soul which this fondness involves. But when she gets sufficiently away from it and its immediate charm over her, she is in a favorable position to pass an even and fair judgment over it and to decide to withdraw herself decisively from its unhealthy and unholy incantation.

*An Unfortunate Bewitchment*

You may say that a week or two is not a long enough period to effect this change of sentiment in such an unfortunate bewitchment. A good Sister, however, no matter how weak she may have been in the past in allowing creatures in some fashion or other to dispossess God in the love of her heart, or at least in a portion of this love, can, with God's help, which will never be wanting her in sufficient abundance in the retreat, make up the lack of time by the intensity of her resolve. Altogether bent on rendering to God what is God's, she tears herself away from the dangers whose gravity she now perceives, regardless of her own or anyone else's feelings. Even as Peter, when "he began to sink, he cried out, saying: Lord, save me!" (Matt., 14, 30), so she cries unto the Lord for help in her soul's plight, in which she ascertains she is sinking deeper and deeper; and with the Psalmist she adds: "O Lord, . . . I am Thine. Save Thou me" (Ps. 118, 94). Her prayer is not in vain.

*A Blessed Rescue*

Year after year the retreat serves unto a number of well-meaning but more or less unfortunate Sisters as a blessed and final

rescue from dangerous and compromising situations. Either they are induced modestly and prudently, without committing themselves more than what is absolutely necessary, to ask for a change of appointment and thus eliminate the perilous attachment entirely or, if this is not feasible or advisable under the circumstances, they irrevocably fix their mind and will in the holy determination never again to fall a victim to the undue attachment, to the folly and sinfulness of which they are no longer blind.

In case your conscience reproves you in this delicate but highly important matter, be sure that you will never have a more favorable occasion to disentangle your soul from an untoward ravishment than is offered you by this retreat. So you correspond without hesitation or delay with the grace God now offers you, however much your unregenerate nature may rebel against and shrink from the sacrifice, it will be for you the most delightful and consoling experience of the retreat to exlaim with the Psalmist: "Our soul hath been delivered as a sparrow out of the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken: and we are delivered. Our help is in the Name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth" (Ps. 123, 7, 8).

*A Three-fold Purpose*

It will conduce much towards rendering your retreat interesting, easy, and profitable if you bear in mind throughout the course of it that its various component elements and features are destined to serve a threefold purpose. First, they are to be looked upon as an atonement for past offenses. Second, they aim at testing your power of virtue. Third, they are designed to steel you in goodness for the future.

Take as an illustration of this aspect of the retreat its first mandate which is that of absolute seclusion and retirement from the world for a given period. It is not unlikely that since your last retreat you failed variously against the point of cloistral enclosure. Instead of loving the protection of the convent and hugging your religious cell as closely and fondly as the rule prescribes and your work permitted, you may have developed a tendency towards distraction and dissipation which, while not of a sinful character, were yet not apt to foster your interior life and increase your desire for union with God.

*No Place to Go*

You were alone with God and yourself only when you had no one else to associate with nicely and decently. The only time you

stayed in your cell was when you knew of no other place to go to with any kind of respectability and propriety. This aloofness from and shyness for your cell or the sacred solitude of the cloister in general gradually begot in you a feeling of dislike for aloneness and conventual enclosure, which made as little for your contentment and happiness as for your advancement in perfection and holiness.

The only way to fall in love with the sacred privacy of the convent cell and to remain infatuated with it is to foster it continually and understandingly. If you love your cell in this manner it will love you, and provide you with thrills and ecstasies no girl or woman ever experiences in any of the palaces of so-called legitimate pleasure or haunts of sinful debauchery in the world. It will constantly furnish you with the peace of Christ which the world cannot give, and which infinitely surpasses in solid beatitude every joy or pleasure the world can give.

### *It Leaves You Cold*

But if you fight shy of your convent cell as much as possible and only inhabit it under constraint, it will leave you cold and lonely when you are in it, and seem to bid you fly it again the sooner the better. I am speaking

figuratively I know; but as I have exposed it, such is unquestionably the psychology of the nun's attitude towards her cloister cell.

During the time you were treating your cell so shabbily as only to resort to it when all other resources to entertain you failed, there were ever so many women and girls of your education, temperament, and personality, who sincerely envied you for the seclusion, quietude, and happiness of your convent home. Sick as they were of all the hollow and deceitful pomp and show of society, or of the tiresome and boring rounds of social engagements, or of the banal and wearisome series of dances, excursions, and shows, coupled as these things invariably are with an unbearable vanity and tyranny of dress and parade, they wished in the depths of their souls again and again they could get away from it all and go where they could be alone with God and themselves, to reflect upon their real human dignity and destiny with peace and composure, undisturbed by the world's irritating frivolities, and inaccessible to its unreasonable demands.

*Selfish Relatives*

There are those women aplenty, too, whose good nature is exploited and abused by inconsiderate and selfish relatives, friends, and

acquaintances. Often they sigh for a haven of protection from their importunities, and they sincerely wish they were alone with God even as the Sisters are, and completely out of the reach of the meddlesome, quarrelsome, and grasping intruders into their personal privacy and business matters.

You, on the contrary, have perhaps depreciated and at times deprecated the solitude and seclusion guaranteed you by your rule. You fled away from it in favor of empty worldly pleasures or needless preoccupations. Far from congratulating yourself on the relative shelter with which the cloister protected you from importunate visits, awkward requests, and untoward demands of your relatives, friends and acquaintances, you renounced it by inviting, yea, importuning them to visit you oftener than the rule allowed, and perhaps more frequently than they had a mind or inclination to come. Or, if you did not visit with friends or relatives in person in an immoderate manner, you did so, perhaps, by way of the telephone or correspondence. And never were you the better off in consequence of your wanton attitude towards religious enclosure.

*Broken Cisterns*

In each instance you learned to your sorrow that by frivolously forsaking your cloistral cell you departed for the time being from the fountain of living water to dig to yourself cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (*vid.* Jerem., 2, 13). Or if there was some water of entertainment and diversion, the words of Jesus apply to it: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but he that shall drink of the water that I will give him"—in the quiet seclusion of the convent cell—"shall not thirst forever" (John, 4, 13).

*A Lesser Nun*

What the Imitation of Christ says in the person of a monk: "Every time I have been with men I returned a lesser man," is applicable relatively, to the nun as well. Every time she mingles with outsiders without necessity or the warrant of her holy rule she is a lesser nun or spouse of Christ than she was before. If, then, your conscience reproves you with carelessness and laxity in this important item of religious life, now is the time to make atonement. In this brief period of the retreat, by bearing the seclusion and isolation of it patiently and cheerfully,

you can make adequate amends for all your failings of the past year in regard to the enclosure of the cloister.

In all things there are two extremes to be avoided. Cloistral enclosure is no exception. If some nuns fail by observing too little enclosure, others make a mistake by relatively practicing too much of it. We here have in mind not the rigorously cloistered or contemplative nuns; nor those Sisters whose rule holds them to strict enclosure: but the ordinary nuns who join the active with the contemplative life. There are Sisters who never, or hardly ever, leave the enclosure of the convent. Perhaps their very insistence and boast that they never go outside the convent walls for any reason whatsoever, even though it is customary for the Sisters here and there to take a recreational stroll outside the grounds of the cloister, or to go on errands and attend to legitimate business in the city, are an indication of singularity rather than of regularity of religious observance.

In consequence of their habit never to go out into the world even though there is a lawful call and the superior's permission for it, say for a filial visit to their parents, if the rule warrants it, these Sisters easily grow warped and onesided in their mind, and not rarely develop a tendency of morbid aloof-

ness and temperamental pessimism. They begin to imagine they are disliked and no one wants them about. They not only avoid the world but also their fellow Sisters as much as possible. They stay away from the common recreation if they can succeed in doing so; but if they must be present at it in the body, their soul is not in it. Far from being a contribution to its good cheer and its exhilarating and restorative influence, their manner at recreation is gloomy, cold, and forbidding: a genuine wet blanket on the joviality, cordiality, and optimism of the other nuns. This cloistral delinquency also calls for atonement during the holy retreat. In regard to conventual enclosure, too, the golden mean is the best.

*The Source of Our Misery*

It must be admitted, however, that by far more Religious fail through too little, rather than too great a love and practice of cloistral enclosure and solitude. Paraphrasing our Lord's words with reference to Himself and His personal poverty, St. Gregory the Great says: "The source of all our weakness, discontentment, and misery is, that everything finds a place in our heart except Him Who made it for Himself. In it the foxes of carnal prudence have a whole labyrinth of

holes and caves; the birds of vanity have warm nests; only for Christ, our Lord, there is no place in it." He at times has not even a stone in it upon which He can rest His head. Whenever this saddest of all conditions is verified in the case of a Religious, it is usually due to too much corporal and mental gallivanting on her part to the detriment of her sacred cloistral tryst with her heavenly Lover.

*Test Your Mettle*

Secondly, the seclusion of the retreat will give you a chance to test your mettle as to this phase of religious life, and find out just how well you can bear it and how much you can stand of it. If you endure the rigid retirement prescribed by the retreat without chafing and complaining; if you even welcome and delight in it because of the help it gives you to find yourself as you really are and to see God as He is in reference to you: you can take the assurance to your soul that you are still good and fast on the narrow path to heaven, and have forfeited little, if any, of the spirit of your holy vocation.

In the third place, the isolation of the retreat, if you pursue and maintain it virtuously, will bring back to you in a high degree and a lasting manner the love of cloistral

solitude and a fondness for the hallowed privacy of the religious cell. If you finish the retreat with a marked preference of the quiet cell to the boisterous world, this alone will guarantee a fruitful spiritual year for you.

*The Bridegroom Is Nettled*

It rather nettles a bridegroom if his spouse does not seem to love and cherish the home into which he has brought her; if she leaves it whenever she can, with or without an excuse; if she is visibly pained whenever she must return to it and abide in it; if she makes no secret of being wearied and chagrined by the necessity of residence in it; if she declares, sometimes in words, oftener and louder, however, by her conduct, that she is happy only when she can fly from the confinement of it.

Jesus, as your divine Bridegroom, lured you away from your secular home, saying: "Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear: and forget thy people and thy father's house. And the King shall greatly desire thy beauty; for He is the Lord thy God, and Him they shall adore" (Ps. 44, 11, 12). He led you into His own home, the convent cell, and at your first introduction into it you exclaimed with the Psalmist: "I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of Thy house: and the place where Thy glory dwelleth. Take

not away my soul, O God!" (Ps. 25, 8, 9.) "Better is one day in Thy courts above thousands. I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God, rather than to dwell in the tabernacles of sinners . . . O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee!" (Ps. 11-13.)

*A Nun's Peaceful Sleep*

It is therefore not at all in keeping with our Lord's goodness to you and your solemn declaration of joy to Him, if you tire of His home and get away and keep away from it as much as you can with any show of honor before the community. Whenever you are tempted to fly from it without any call of duty our Lord seems silently and plaintively to ask you, as He asked His disciples regarding a different subject: "Will you also go away?" (John, 6, 68.) If now, in the retreat, you reinforce yourself again in the love of holy solitude and in attachment to our Lord's and your home, you will have no difficulty in answering each time: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (*ib.*, 69). Your immediate reward will then qualify you to add: "In peace in the selfsame I will sleep, and I will rest: for Thou, O Lord, singularly hast settled me in hope" (Ps. 4, 9, 10).

# LECTURE VI.

## Concentration on the Lord

*"They were all filled with the Holy Ghost"* (Acts, 2, 4).

Our Lord desired the apostles to go into seclusion in their expectancy of the Holy Spirit not merely to get away from the world and its distractions and preoccupations, but mainly to be able to concentrate entirely upon God and their communion with Him. For the same reason He has now bidden you to get entirely away not only from the world and its lawful diversions—for your vocation calls for and provides this sequestration as your ordinary and permanent condition—but as much as possible even from your regular vocational work in the convent in the interest of the community and others.

### *A Jealous God*

In the retreat our Lord is more than ever a jealous God and insists on having you for and with and in Himself alone to the exclusion of every other object or occupation. Briefly, He wants you to be concentrated on Him from the beginning to the end of your retreat, if you expect to derive from it the

fullness of the Holy Ghost. He never allows you to aim at serving two masters. In the retreat, speaking humanly, He is more than ever all attention to see that you do not serve anyone else but Himself. Hence, He cuts you off completely from every possibility of serving His rival, the world, that has beguiling enticements and engrossments even for Religious in some form or other, by bidding you to dismiss every activity, and forego every converse, and forbid entrance to every thought, whose sole object is not He Himself, His love for you, and your love for Him, His glory and your salvation. This purpose of His evidently controls and domineers the whole arrangement of the retreat and its entire course from beginning to end.

*Chasing Hares*

Today in every aspect of secular life concentration is the password for success. "Stick to your bush" has always been considered as an adage containing much practical wisdom. In the keen competition of today its value is more than ever recognized. Specialists are everywhere in demand and, if they are able in their line of work, they command the highest prices. The man who chases one hare is more likely to be

rewarded in the end than he who tries to chase two or three at one time. Perhaps the main reason our aspirations towards perfection and sanctity remain rather sadly unfulfilled is because of the lack of concentration. Our efforts are divided among many pursuits deflecting our attention more or less away from God and leaving what is left for Him quite impotent and resultless. Hence, He brings us into retreat and imposes conditions that will not allow us to share the interest that belongs to Him alone with creatures of whatsoever description, and in whatsoever guise or disguise.

*The Historic Steamboat*

While he was still practicing law, Abraham Lincoln used an illustration in one of his cases before court to bring in relief the peculiar limitations of the opposing attorney. He said that his opponent somehow reminded him of a steamboat which, when it was making its weary way along the river, had power to do only one of two things at a time. If it moved, it could not whistle; if it whistled it could not move. "My adversary," Lincoln said, "appears to be suffering from a similar handicap: when he talks, he cannot think; when he thinks, he cannot talk. Hence he is never talking and thinking at the same time."

Whatever power of mind and heart we may possess we need all of it to commune with God unto our personal union with and entire absorption in Him in this holy retreat. If Julius Caesar of old could simultaneously occupy six secretaries on different subjects without a risk to efficiency—if the story is true—none of his subjects was such as to demand all his attention by its very nature, as is the primary and solitary subject of the retreat, according to our Lord's solemn and emphatic injunction: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind" (Luke, 10, 27). Indeed, after such a turning to God there is no attention of the spirit left for anyone or anything else. In a show, to bring out the leading feature, the spotlight is turned on it while the remainder of the stage is left in utter darkness. In a retreat, Jesus wants the entire spotlight of a nun's attention and love.

Psychologists tell us that worry of the mind becomes dangerous and disastrous only in such cases in which it entirely revolves about and is concentrated on one single subject. By distributing it among several subjects it is diluted and weakened and, consequently, less perilous. What a nervous and worrisome person must avoid, therefore, is to brood over one subject exclusively.

The same psychological law operates also reversely and most wholesomely. Concentration on one inspiring and elevating subject gives the mind its greatest vigor and fills it with the noblest ambition. The more intense the concentration is, provided it remains within the bounds of reason, the better and more gratifying are the results. Since no subject is in any way so inspiring and ennobling as God and His love for our soul and His desire for its salvation, the benefit of a good retreat which has us to be immersed completely in the contemplation of this subject is at once and very clearly apparent.

*The Ecstasies of Love*

A young man never feels so much incited to high endeavor and so willing to and capable of achieving success as when he is in the ecstasies of his first great love and under the spell of a charming creature, the meditation of whose unexampled goodness and loveliness absorbs him altogether and every moment of his time. The same happens relatively to the girl with regard to him if she reciprocates his love. If, then, a merely human love, nursed by concentration, gives so high a joy and so powerful an initiative and so glorious an optimism to its bene-

ficiaries, what must we not expect from the pure love of God, and His love in return for it, when in a well made retreat this love is nourished and fanned to its highest pitch by a fond, unqualified, and incessant contemplation of His infinite and inexhaustible charms and His most pressing and inalienable claims to the soul's love!

*The Chorus Girl's Romance*

Some time ago the papers brought a dispatch from New York stating that a chorus girl of one of the shows succeeded in winning the attentions of a wealthy aged millionaire to such a degree that he proposed marriage to her, promising her he would take her, in case she accepted his proposal, on a trip to Honolulu. This offer the girl, who was beautiful and clever, but poor, could not resist, and she consented to marry the old gentleman. Her friends, the girls who were on the stage with her, asked her how she ever conquered so rich a man as to induce him to propose marriage. "It was easy," she said in her gay and carefree manner, "I just concentrated."

The marriage took place and the couple started for Honolulu. When they got as far as Denver the age of the bridegroom made him tire of the discomforts of traveling; so

much so that he said he could not stand any more of it, and that he would not proceed to Honolulu. The young woman wanted to hold him to his promise, but she did not find him so compliant after marriage as before. He told her she could go ahead if she liked, but he would return to Baltimore, where he lived. As she did not have any of his money as yet she had to return East with him. She did not like Baltimore, however, or rather she could not suffer the bore she had taken for a husband. The result was, she got a divorce and went back to her old place on the stage in New York. The girls were glad to welcome her back. They asked her what she intended to do. She replied naively and confidently: "I think I am going to concentrate again." Her views on the indissolubility and sanctity of matrimony were not commendable, but her conceptions of psychology were true and enviable. She believed in and aptly applied the force of concentration.

*When Nuns Concentrate*

It is said without disrespect: but whenever nuns concentrate on winning and holding the love and favor of Jesus, their mystical Bridegroom, with the same ardor, pointedness, and persistency with which maidens of the world openly or stealthily pursue the man

whom they are eager to win as a husband, they cannot fail to become saints in a short time, and be immensely happy in consequence.

These Sisters never have to complain about their divine Spouse's fickleness, faithlessness, and coldness, as brides in the world not uncommonly have reasons to complain not long after the wedding festivities, and as the girl in the story soon experienced to her disillusionment. Jesus has never disappointed a single soul that sought Him with sincerity and clung to Him in loyalty. On the contrary, He never fails to grow sweeter and more generous with His heavenly endearments the closer a soul approaches Him and the more she sacrifices every other love for the sake of her union with Him. In practically every convent there are a number of undeniable illustrations of this psychological and mystical phenomenon.

### *He Wants It All*

How much Jesus wants to be loved by the souls that dedicate themselves to Him He clearly enunciated when He said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind" (Matt., 22, 37). He had a purpose in mentioning the "whole heart", the

"whole soul", and the "whole mind". One of the three is not enough for Him, nor can He put up with only a part of any of the three. He simply wants all our love and spared no pains in making this plain to us.

It may sound somewhat quixotic, but it would not be an uninteresting revelation if God would make it known to every Sister in retreat just what portion of her heart, soul, and mind belongs to Jesus. Many nuns, of course, would be highly pleased at learning how complete was the immolation of themselves to their divine Lover; others, however, would feel abashed as they ascertained how very far they are from giving their Spouse the entirety of their love as they pretended and pledged themselves to do at their holy profession.

*The Heart Centers on Its Treasure*

While this revelation is out of question, Jesus Himself gives us the method by which we can measure the extent of our love to Him, saying: "Where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also" (Matt., 6, 21). In the retreat we have a splendid occasion to apply this test. The seclusion and isolation it provides qualify us to test our heart, to observe whether it is altogether absorbed and immersed in God, or whether it leans towards

and ogles at and flirts with objects or persons that unduly compete with Him for its love. Our findings in the case must regulate our behavior in either confirming our heart in its true and faithful love to Jesus, or in at once correcting its disloyal detours and converging all its power of thought, desire, and love upon Him Who, as St. Augustine beautifully says, made it for Himself in such a way that it can find no rest unless it rests in Him. That our heart may find perfect and permanent rest in Him alone Jesus calls us into retreat.

*Cold Meditations*

Here again we may recall the threefold purpose of the retreat mentioned in a previous chapter. Its concentration serves, first, the purpose of atonement for your lack of concentration on God or of the intense interior life of which you have been guilty in the past year. This lack manifested itself very likely in tepid or cold meditations and examens of conscience, in the irregular and lukewarm use of the practice of living continuously in God's presence, and in the neglect of ejaculatory prayers, loving aspirations and spiritual communions. In the second place you can now try yourself out and see just how much and how well you

can concentrate on God in the forms just mentioned. Bereft of all excuses for distraction and diversion in the way of necessary occupations and vocational duties, by which you like to defend or minimize your alienation from the interior life during the year, you can put yourself to a real and candid test in this regard in the retreat.

*They Sigh Plaintively*

Every now and then you hear Sisters sighing plaintively or even exclaiming dolefully: "Oh, if I could only get away from all this engrossing work and these distracting business worries, so I could fly into solitude where I could give myself to the contemplation of God's goodness and beauty and my own badness and hideousness, unhindered and unhampered, to my heart's content! Oh, how I should enjoy the complete and continuous isolation and uninterrupted privacy of the Carthusian nun, whose only companion is God, and whose one delight is solitude. O blessed solitude! O solitary blessedness!" Maybe you belong to this category. In the retreat your desire to be alone with God is fulfilled. You can now probe its genuinity and permanency.

Finally, by pursuing close concentration upon your heavenly Bridegroom throughout

the entire retreat you can ground yourself in it again so thoroughly that you will abide in it unswervingly through the course of the entire ensuing year.

*She Had Four Suitors*

There is a story told of a charming young lady who was pursued and besieged by four ardent suitors. Somehow she had all four of them believing that respectively they had the best prospects to win her hand. After a long pursuit, however, they felt she was merely making sport of them all and used their ardor to indulge her vanity and conceit. They therefore agreed among themselves that they would force her to declare herself in favor of the one she preferred, whoever it might be, in order to put an end to the unbearable suspense in which she was keeping them.

*Her Snuff-Box*

When they definitely challenged the young woman to express her predilection she again teased them by saying that she had her lover's picture on the inside of the lid of her snuff-box, which was a fashionable article of a lady's personal equipment in those days. She no sooner said this when all four young

men pounced upon her to seize her snuff-box and discover her choice. Very adroitly the artful coquette arranged the tussle in a manner as to have him, whom she actually preferred and truly loved, to capture the box. When he impatiently and pantingly opened the box he noticed that the inside of the lid was a mirror in which he saw his picture. He, of course, was very happy.

*Your Four Wooers*

Four competitors are striving after your love and consecration: Jesus, the flesh, the world, and the devil. Although you have long ago, and with much finality, declared yourself in favor of Jesus, dedicating yourself to Him alone, altogether, and forever, still you may have allowed yourself to slacken in the observance of loyalty to your profession in a way as to give the other three rivals renewed hopes of winning your favor and conquering your love.

In the retreat you must once more definitely dispel their prospects by declaring that He, Whose picture is in your soul, your mind, your imagination, and your heart, is the one Hero, Lord, and God of your being. And nothing will be more apt to retouch, enliven, and bring into bright relief the

picture of Jesus in your soul than the concentrated meditation of His goodness, sweetness, and loveliness during the days of the retreat.

*How to Remember Names*

Years ago a clever and successful young salesman told me that when dealing with a prospective customer a salesman usually scores a point if he calls him by name. A good way to remember a man's name after the first introduction to him was, he said, the immediate and frequent repetition of it in the course of the first conversation. Say the man's name was Mr. Brown. Upon hearing it the salesman would say, for example: "Mr. Brown, what I intend to show you will startle you perhaps at first. But, Mr. Brown, it will not be long when it will enlist your admiration. And then, Mr. Brown, you will end by falling in love with it and placing an order for it."

A good nun follows the same method in winning the good graces of Jesus, her divine lover. By incessant aspirations, in which she gives Him all the pet and endearing names her love prompts her to use, she becomes more and more concentrated on and united with her heavenly Bridegroom.

*A New Novitiate*

Everyone knows that the retreat is to be to every Religious a new novitiate in miniature. It is to bring back year after year the wholesome lessons and heavenly impressions and high impulses of the novitiate in all their content and ardor. The main object of the novitiate is to engender and nurture the interior life, or the life hidden in Christ, by weaning the soul of the novice definitely and completely away from the world. If the retreat succeeds in returning to you all that you have forfeited of the interior life since you have left the novitiate it must be proclaimed a complete success. It will do this if you lend your cooperation to the grace that God bestows upon you in the retreat.

*"The Old Man"*

In the words of St. Paul you will again "put off, according to former conversation, the old man, who is corrupted according to the desire of error. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind: and put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth" (Ephes., 4, 22-24). There are few, if any Sisters, who "put off", according to former conversation, "the old man" with such definiteness that he does not

somehow reassert himself rather strongly from year to year, so that he always has to be put off anew by the nun who is earnestly striving after the "justice and holiness of truth".

*A Humorous Incident*

It may momentarily and even profitably relieve the seriousness of this discussion if I now relate a humorous incident which occurred to me years ago. I was asked by a maiden lady of much piety and culture, who was a chronic invalid, a victim of infantile paralysis which she had suffered in her sixth year, to enrol her in the Third Order of St. Francis, in her apartment. When I visited her to perform the enrolment, a young lady friend of hers, keen and vivacious of temperament, was calling on her. She was to witness the ceremony. The enrolment formula contains the aforesaid words of St. Paul referring to the old and new man. After saying them in Latin, in which language the words are not particularly striking, I thought I should also speak them in English so the candidate might catch the full meaning of the ceremony. This was unfortunate, however, as I noticed no sooner I spoke of putting off the old man and putting on the new one. The words struck both ladies in a

profane and frivolous sense so much so that they had all they could do to restrain their laughter until the ceremony was completed. Then they gave free vent to it, saying, that neither ever had an old man to put off. If we could say as much in a spiritual sense at every annual retreat, we should be happy and dear to Jesus, indeed.

*A Remarkable Woman*

Because of its connection with our subject, I may also recall the following occurrence: Years ago I preached a retreat to Sisters in the state of Louisiana. The superior was a woman of unusual calibre of mind and heart. She had built two hospitals within fourteen years and won considerable prestige for the community and herself among non-Catholics as well as Catholics in a territory in which bigotry against the Church had been fierce and relentless. She recounted to me the story of her call to the religious life. She was born in Ireland. When she was nineteen years of age she went to Paris, France, on a visit to friends. They told her that they were to attend a retreat that was to be preached for the members of the Third Order Secular of St. Francis of Assisi, and asked her if she cared to make the retreat with them. Being piously inclined, she was at once willing and

accepted the invitation with thanks. The Father who preached the retreat was a Franciscan friar in middle age. He began the retreat with the oft quoted text: "Behold I will allure her and will lead her into the wilderness: and I will speak to her heart" (Osee, 2, 14).

*They Were Meant for Her*

As soon as the preacher pronounced these sacred words a strong intimation seized her that they were particularly meant for her and that God wanted her to be a nun. She recoiled from the very thought. Pious as she was and wanted to be, she never had had any inclination to become a nun; in fact, she always was averse to it as by instinct. But the more the retreat advanced, the stronger the impression grew in her that our Lord desired her to enter the convent. Yet she continued to resist it with all her might and when the retreat was over she did her best to banish the thought entirely and forever from her mind. In this she had no success, however.

*The Invitation of the King*

For five continuous years the convent kept on bobbing up in her mind in season and out of season, with a threat of lifelong remorse

and regret if she did not yield to its (in her mind) importunate invitation. At last, to procure some peace of mind in the matter, she decided to put the question up to her confessor, a Jesuit Father, for final adjudication. After he had heard her story he asked why she was so reluctant to accept the gracious invitation of the King of kings to become His own dear spouse and consecrated bride; why she was so stubborn in refusing the greatest gift and highest distinction God can confer upon a girl in this life; and what else she could ever expect of God in the way of heavenly favors if she treated this one in so cold and shabby a manner.

*A Missionary Nun*

In answer to this deserved charge she said that if God intended her to be a nun she wanted to be a Franciscan nun, as it was in a Franciscan retreat that she conceived the first idea of her vocation; and moreover she wanted to be a missionary nun. Her confessor gladly acquiesced in these desires of his penitent and pointed out to her a convent in France in which both would be nicely met. She applied for admission in the convent and was received. No sooner she entered, all her previous aversion for the religious life left her entirely and, as it seems, forever.

A number of years after her reception the community was asked to found an establishment in the southern part of our country, which the order looked upon as foreign mission territory. It accepted the invitation and the Sister of our story was sent as the first superior of the new foundation. She succeeded so admirably with it that within a relatively brief period she could establish a second hospital in a different locality. She has now been a very happy nun for over twenty-five years. A feeling of lively gratitude wells up from her heart every time she hears the loving words: "Behold I will allure her and will lead her into the wilderness: and I will speak to her heart."

*In Love with the Convent*

No Sister but has reason to feel the same with reference to these beautiful words. If they have not been the immediate cause of your growing conscious of your call to the religious life, the consideration of them must make you fall more and more in love with the convent and the particular community of which God planned you should eventually become a member; and it should chase from your heart, definitely and for always, every disinclination that for whatsoever reason may want to rise in your heart against the

grand vocation God has given you. It may help you to this if we now pay some attention to the individual words of the text in question and apply it to our present retreat.

Jesus says in regard to you: "Behold!" Whenever God uses this word in the Bible it is a sign that an announcement of supreme importance is to be made, as in the well-known text: "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son: and His Name shall be called Emmanuel" (Isaias, 7, 14). Evidently God attaches great importance to the favor He tenders you when He calls you into retreat. It is a most enviable distinction for a soul to be accorded so private, familiar, confidential, and long an audience with the Creator of heaven and earth, the Prince of peace, and the Father of eternity.

*Boys Like Nuts*

Jesus says further: "I will allure her." He does not compel you by force to make this retreat. He allured you to it by love. It is the only force He cares to use when there is question of His service. He wants only cheerful givers, eager lovers or sweethearts, and wilful listeners. Speaking of the irresistible power of love St. Augustine says that if you show a boy nuts you draw him to you. He comes gladly. Similarly everyone,

whatever be his age or condition, is attracted by what he loves. If you, then, love your divine Spouse as you profess to do by the very habit you wear, the house you live in, the companions you keep, and the mode of life you follow, nothing must be so apt to lure you as His voice, bidding you to come for a private interview and a feast of undisturbed and uninterrupted mystical union with Him for the whole time of the retreat. To nothing is a good nun easier and sweeter lured than to this spiritual treat with the God of her soul.

*Apart from the Crowd*

Jesus "will lead her into the wilderness". It is the way of a jealous lover, as our Lord positively proclaims Himself to be respecting the souls that are particularly consecrated to Him, to lead his beloved one apart from the crowd into a solitary place where he can enjoy her undivided attention and absorb all the love of her heart. He wants her to see no one, hear no one, and think of no one but Him. He intends to force her, as it were, by her very condition, to concentrate on Him exclusively. For this very reason our Savior leads the nun into the mystical wilderness or desert of the retreat. He draws her away from the converse of even the other Sisters

and her ordinary work in order to compel her by her very situation to focus all her attention and love upon Him alone.

*The Mystical Rendezvous*

The difference between our Lord and an earthly lover is this, however, that while an earthly lover brings about the complete segregation of his beloved for selfish reasons, and more with a view to his own happiness than to hers, and impelled more by a desire of his own pleasure than hers, Jesus purposes to furnish the highest happiness to the soul He lures to Himself when He leads her into the desert of the retreat. It is with an eye to her advancement in grace and glory that He seeks His own glory by the mystical rendezvous of the spiritual exercises. Jesus purposely chooses a wilderness for this rendezvous, namely a waste and barren place so that even it may in no way engage or distract the attention and inclination of His beloved one.

*Heart Speaks to Heart*

"And I will speak to her heart." In these words Jesus declares the final intent of His alluring you and leading you into the mystical desert of the retreat. He wants to speak to your heart. First of all, He wants to do

the speaking. He has something very special and personal to say to you. Maybe He has been wanting to say it to you long ago, but you never gave Him the chance. You were too engrossed with other things which, however good in themselves, did not make for your absorption in Jesus and His love. Or you wilfully avoided the occasion of being alone with Him for fear He would have certain things to tell you which for some reason you did not care to hear.

Either you felt very guilty as Adam did when he fled from God instead of walking with Him in the cool of the afternoon as had been his wont; or you feared you might be asked to surrender attachments or propensities of which you had become too fond; or on general principles you rather fought shy of the interior life as such, fearing you might grow too pious and other-worldly and consequently forfeit what you considered honorable fun and a good time with moderation.

*He Does Not Shout*

Anyway, Jesus waited in vain for the opportunity to speak to your heart in the way He desired. Hence, He has lured you into this retreat. Now He is determined to have a real heart to heart talk with you. He

invites you to it lovingly, saying: "Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear . . . And the King shall greatly desire thy beauty" (Ps. 44, 11). Your part is to answer: "I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me: for He will speak peace unto His people; and unto His saints; and unto them that are converted to the heart. Surely His salvation is near to them that fear Him: that glory may dwell in our lands" (Ps. 84, 9, 10). The Master does not say that He will shout, but that He will speak to your heart. To hear Him clearly absolute quiet and close attention are necessary. "The Lord is not in the wind . . . The Lord is not in the earthquake." But in "a whistling of a gentle air" (3 Kings, 19, 11, 12).

*A Veritable Bore*

Here I recall a humorous story told me by one of our friars in Rome years ago. The minister-general of the order was a busy man. One of his consultors-general took himself and his position somewhat too seriously. Quite frequently he would ask for an interview with the minister-general, no matter how busy the latter was, and expose to him at considerable and excessive length his views and suggestions regarding the administration of the order. He got to be a veritable bore.

On one occasion, being much engrossed in business, the superior declined his lengthy interview and begged to be left alone. Then the officious consultor asserted himself, saying emphatically: "The order has elected me as your official consultor. And you are going to listen to me and hear all I have to say." The superior acquiesced for prudential reasons.

Our Lord has lured you into this retreat to forestall every possibility on your part to evade His suggestions, advices, and reprimands to you. He says, as it were, very decidedly: "You are here to get My message. Hence you will listen to Me until I have told you all I want you to know."

*Her Heart Is At Fault*

Why does Jesus want to speak to a nun's heart rather than to her mind? Because when a Sister becomes estranged from Jesus altogether or in part her heart is usually at fault. It has grown or is growing indifferent and cold. Its interest is elsewhere. It has found a new treasure. It is worshiping a false god. It is trying the impossible by aiming at serving two masters. Our Lord can hardly say regarding her, as He said regarding His enemies on Calvary, that she does not know what she is doing. She

usually knows it but too well. Her conscience gives her no rest on the subject. She feels continuously uneasy and unhappy because of the wanton detour and unfair division of her heart. Her mind reproaches her day and night for her disloyalty and infidelity to her Spouse. So it is not her mind that needs a good talking to, but her heart.

*He Coaxes Them*

The same holds good regarding the vast majority of Sisters who are not in line for reproach on the part of Jesus, but for sincere and generous commendation for their wholehearted devotion, unswerving love, and indubious faithfulness. Jesus wants to talk to their hearts, too, rather than to their minds in praising and rewarding them and, especially, in coaxing them to an even higher consecration and a more burning love. He wants to induce them to strive after some particular heroism in virtue and an unusual degree of sanctity. He is psychologist enough to know that woman is best approached on the side of her heart, which is but another way of saying that woman is easiest and strongest swayed by the irresistible appeal to love. For this reason He speaks to her heart.

*A Presentiment*

Sometimes a Sister has a strong presentiment as to what her Great Lover intends to say to her heart, even as Adam knew beforehand what God wanted to discuss with him after his fall and flight from God. Jesus may ask you, for example, and you have reason to know He will, why you passed so many days within the year without receiving Him in Holy Communion; why your spiritual communions were not more frequent and ardent; and why the intervals between your confessions got to be so long. He may inquire how long you intend to maintain that uncharitable, cold, and unforgiving attitude towards your fellow Sister, or that independent, defying, and irreverent manner towards your superior, or that unsympathetic, forbidding, and unfair conduct towards your subject.

At times Jesus speaks to a Sister of things the thought of which never occurred to her. He wants her to devote herself to the foreign missions, with the approbation of her superiors, of course; or, if she cannot go to foreign countries in person, He asks her to do what is in her power to subsidize them spiritually and materially. He may suggest to another nun she should interest herself especially in virtuously corralling good candidates for the

religious and priestly life. Our Lord covers a lot of ground in the mystical tête-à-tête of the retreat in which His Sacred Heart speaks to the hearts of the dearest followers He has on this earth.

*She Sat at His Feet*

With reference to this feature of the retreat it is advisable once more to remember the three purposes of the retreat. By listening to Jesus in the retreat, say as Mary listened to Him while she was sitting at His feet in Bethany, and was so absorbed in His divine utterances that she forgot everything else, you will atone for having neglected to listen to our Lord's voice throughout the year, or for not having given Him a chance to speak to your heart at all because of your incessant mental dissipation and engrossment with other things.

You gave your own self-love, your vanity, love of ease and comfort, and your thirst for honor and power, every occasion to speak to your heart. The world, too, found various openings and sundry times for the same purpose. You even allowed the devil, through indulging your evil penchants, especially your ruling passion, to speak to you in the disguise of an angel of light and prevail upon you to compromise yourself regarding

your holy vows and the rule and constitutions. But for the private and intimate talk of Jesus you had neither time nor inclination.

*Give Him Your Ear*

Now you can make it all good by giving Jesus the ear of your heart lovingly and exclusively. Thereby you can also measure how intently and enduringly you can listen to His gracious and benevolent remarks and suggestions, each one of which is designed to further your increase in grace and glory.

Finally, you can once more contract the salutary habit of listening to Jesus constantly and cheerfully in all your waking moments; of hearing His voice everywhere, through every creature, and at all times; of catching His softest whisper and His most gentle allusion; and of preferring His meek, yet persuasive voice, to the noisy and boisterous clamorings of the flesh, the world, and the devil. In the retreat and after the retreat your habitual attitude in all the conjunctures of your convent life will be expressed in the words of Samuel: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth" (1 Kings, 3, 10).

# LECTURE VII.

## Silence and Prayer

*"They were all filled with the Holy Ghost"* (Acts, 2, 4).

In the life of our Lord we read that one day, in a great storm at sea, "rising up, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea: Peace. Be still. And the wind ceased: and there was made a great calm" (Mark, 4, 39). In a figurative way Jesus produces the same phenomenon in the soul of a nun that repairs to a retreat. Before she enters it her soul may be troubled with storms of temptations, doubts, and misgivings; with winds of anxieties and worries; with uncanny noises of impending spiritual disasters; as soon as she begins her retreat, however, Jesus bids the storms to cease in her soul, and a great calm ensues.

### *A Universal Hubbub*

The very change that takes place in the external carriage of the Sisters no sooner the retreat opens bespeaks these wondrous effects of the retreat in their souls. Just before the bell calls the nuns to the initial exercise of the retreat they are usually en-

gaged in a general and lively conversation. They are meeting one another for the first time in years, perhaps; or at least for an entire year. Since then so much of interest has happened and needs to be mutually retailed and discussed. There is a universal hubbub of a friendly and sociable nature running through the multitude of Sisters. They all seem to be talking as fast and as much as they can at the same time, apprehending as they do that soon they must suspend speaking to one another for a considerable period of time. Hence, they are making the most of the few remaining moments.

*The Magic Power of the Bell*

Suddenly, in the midst of the greatest din of conversation there is heard the sound of the bell calling the Sisters to the introductory exercises of the retreat. It works as the voice of Jesus on the winds. He is charging the Sisters, as it were, in His blandest manner, saying: "Peace. Be still." And He expects that there ensue at once "a great calm", that will be scrupulously maintained throughout the entire retreat. Without this calm the concentration, which is the prime factor in producing the results of the retreat, is altogether out of question.

This hallowed calm, in the absence of which the isolation and seclusion of the retreat are sheer hypocrisy, mockery, self-deceit, and a pure loss of time, is maintained only by the exact and consistent observance of silence on the part of every retreatant without exception. We are not to be superstitious anent the retreat silence, so that we should disallow even a justifiable exchange of words in a subdued voice when and only as much as the need of the occasion warrants it; nor should we declare a retreat null and void merely because one or the other unnecessary word was spoken in it. Yet everyone somehow conversant with psychology knows that without the due observance of the prescribed silence any effective recollection of the mind is impossible. And, barring this recollection, any solid fruit cannot be derived from the retreat.

*She Does Not Like Retreat*

What furthermore falls strongly in the balance in making this deduction is the reflection that a Sister who in the retreat will not even do as much as observe the enjoined silence evidently lacks the good disposition required for an efficient retreat. She is not making retreat of her own accord, or because she values it and is minded to get out of it what she can. She takes part in it only under

moral compulsion and will be restricted by it in her self-indulgent habits as little as possible, as far as she is concerned. Naturally for her the retreat will mean only one more great grace abused and to be rigidly accounted for in judgment.

But even the unfortunate Sister, whose presence in the retreat is merely apparent and nominal instead of being real and genuine, if she is a lady, will observe the retreat silence from motives of lady-like courtesy and delicacy in order not to obstruct in any way the good fruits the other Sisters expect from their retreat. She knows they are there for what they consider a purpose of supreme importance; for them the retreat is an outstanding event in the entire year; they have been eagerly longing for it for months; they want to dedicate themselves to it without the least disturbance or interference of any kind; they are consequently highly sensitive and fastidious and resent it keenly if any untoward and uncalled for influence jeopardizes the result of their retreat. In view of their attitude, therefore, the cultured nun, however little she may be in sympathy with the retreat herself, is on the alert not to be guilty of a violation of good manners by breaking the silence herself and inducing others to do the same.

*The Value of Silence*

There are grounds for asserting that, if a Sister in retreat does no more than observe the silence of it merely for Jesus' sake, she makes a good retreat. For some reason or other she feels unable to enter any further into the spirit of the retreat. But to show her good will and her determination not to be separated more from her divine Spouse she resolves to observe the silence scrupulously and, of course, she is present, at least in the body, at all the retreat exercises. For this sacrifice alone of holding her tongue for the period of the retreat—a sacrifice she would not make for anyone else whatsoever—Jesus will reward her by bestowing upon her the benefits of a fruitful retreat. The supposition is justified that she will not be long in merely observing the silence of the retreat. It will have hardly begun, provided she is true to her resolve, when our Lord's sweet grace will have her to enjoy all the phases of the retreat and exploit their heavenly treasures beyond limit and measure. No one can catch our Lord napping or nodding, speaking reverently, in the discharge of generosity in return for the slightest favor rendered Him.

*The Elusive Tongue*

In the matter of the retreat silence particularly the three purposes of the retreat, referred to again and again in previous chapters, come powerfully into play. If Sisters — this counts as well for others, too, of course; but this retreat being for Sisters, their cases come up for special comment—have any sins of the past year to atone for they are doubtless for the most part sins of the tongue. There will be few, if any, Sisters who are not somehow guilty in this regard. The words of St. James come to mind: "The tongue no man can tame, an unquiet evil, full of deadly poison" (James, 3, 8). The word "man" in this text is obviously used in a generic sense, including woman as well. There are cynical men who contend that woman has even less control over her tongue than man has. It would be idle to pursue this age-old and never-ending dispute. St. James, however, says in addition: "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man" (*ib.*, 2). No Sister lays claim to being perfect. Whatever imperfections a Sister has are usually reducible to or somehow connected with or discovered by her use or misuse of her tongue.

*A Sister's Tongue*

What, then, are those faults a nun is likely to commit through an unguarded or unbridled tongue? They are various and, dependently upon the temperament of the individual in question, they easily run through nearly the entire decalogue in some degree or other. To begin with the first commandment of God, for example, Sisters at times transgress by making irreverent remarks against holy persons, places, or things, or by expressing disrespectful doubts or unbecoming misgivings regarding matters of faith or authentic dispositions of the Church. Some Sisters make superstitious utterances with all the demeanor of believing in the absurdity.

*The Organ Loft*

There are Sisters who sin by unnecessary and irreverent speech in the presence of the Most Blessed Sacrament, or even during the Holy Sacrifice of Mass and other liturgical services. Through being in church and in the sanctuary or sacristy so much, owing to their duties of attending to the beauty of the house of God, they are tempted to lose sight of the awful sacredness of the place and to contract an attitude of undue familiarity towards it by indulging in conversations that are out of season and out of place. The same holds

good, sometimes in an even higher degree, regarding Sisters whose duties keep them in the organ loft during divine services. Because their charge as organists or choir leaders often justifies their talking to the choir members they easily and almost unknowingly glide into the unbecoming habit of speaking and conversing in church without any just cause whatever.

*An Exclamation of Surprise*

The irreverent use of the Holy Name of God, Lord, Jesus Christ, and other sacred names of our religion is not altogether foreign to every nun. It happens at times that nuns gradually and more or less unconsciously contract the unseemly practice of using God's or the Lord's Name as a mere exclamation of surprise, joy, or horror, without any concomitant reverence, however, and not without considerable disedification of the Sisters and, especially, of the lay persons who are within earshot or are told of this sinful mannerism in Religious. Fortunately real cursing and swearing are so rare in convents that no notice need be taken of them.

*The Backbone of the Order*

Religious commit sins of the tongue by speaking in an irreverent, carping, fault-find-

ing, and derogatory manner of their ecclesiastical and religious superiors, their offices or dignities, their administration and enactments, thereby weakening the authority and discipline which are the backbone of the order and the greatest source of its strength as a community. Superiors, on their part, sin by the tongue by making uncharitable, unfair, and belittling remarks about their subjects without justification, either to higher or other superiors, or to subjects or, what is worse, to non-members of the community. As it not seldom happens that the promising career of a good, worthy superior is ruined by ungrounded charges and false accusations of unscrupulous subjects, so, too, it is of but too frequent occurrence that the bright career of a sterling subject is demolished by the crushing and unjustifiable criticism passed on her behavior or disposition and widely propagated by a superior who is prejudiced against her.

*In a Fit of Anger*

Sisters sin by the tongue when in a fit of anger, peevishness, or moodiness, or from a spirit of ill-will or vindictiveness they say ugly, mean, disagreeable, and cutting words to a fellow Sister or to whomsoever, making unkind accusations, casting offensive slurs, hurling shady innuendoes, or calling others

opprobrious names. Fortunately nothing has here to be said with reference to conversation that is sinfully vulgar and improper, let alone smacking of indecency, as our nuns are all known to follow meticulously the counsel of St. Paul: "All uncleanness . . . , let it not so much be named among you, as becometh saints: or obscenity or foolish talking or scurrility, which is to no purpose: but rather giving of thanks" (Ephes., 5, 3, 4).

*The Ubiquitous Gossip*

Against the eighth commandment of God Sisters sin by indulging in what is called ordinary uncharitable gossip. Nothing new is revealed against the absent one; much less is she slandered or maligned; but her faults and shortcomings are dwelled on without a just cause, and with a certain interest and gratification that disclose a lack of charity, and a breach of the golden rule, by which our Savior bids us to treat others as we desire them to treat us. This sin becomes grosser, of course, when it runs into real defamation or even calumny; or if it assumes the character of low whispering by which one tells a given party, from evil motives, what another has said against him or her, thus creating enmity and feud where formerly there was amity and peace.

### *"Every Man Is a Liar"*

Lying also violates the eighth commandment, and Sisters as well as others fall under the condemnation of the Psalmist who declared: "I said in my excess: Every man is a liar" (Ps. 115, 11). By this is not meant that every man is actually a liar, without a single exception. But it is rather stated that man is by nature prone to lying directly or indirectly, to hypocrisy, and deceit. Sometimes nuns give way to this weakness by deviating from the straight and narrow path of the truth. They especially, who are given to flattery and servility towards their superiors, in order to ingratiate themselves for their own selfish interests, are easily beguiled into adopting a lying and hypocritical attitude.

### *When Silence Is Wrong*

The above mentioned catalogue of sins perpetrated by the tongue receives a sad supplement by the sins committed through the neglect of using the tongue when its use is obligatory for a Sister. Here I am not referring to the rare cases when a Sister from shame or pride refuses to reveal her mortal sins in confession; nor when she is in duty bound charitably to correct a transgressor, or even to report a certain irregularity of

conduct of another Sister to the proper superior, but sinfully neglects to do so; nor am I adverting to the case of a Sister who from sheer jealousy withholds a word of prudent praise from a Sister who deserves it and sorely needs it: but I rather have in mind the sins that are done by Sisters through disrespectful and uncharitable pouting and sulking towards superiors or fellow Sisters, which induces them, in their oversensitiveness and morbidity of temperament, to let days, weeks, and months pass without their addressing a single sisterly greeting to or exchanging a single friendly word with the superior or a certain subject or, for that matter, with any Sister whatsoever. Often they are more guilty of uncharitableness by this stubbornness in not using their tongue than they would be if they misused it to spit out all the hurt and venom seething in their proud and unforgiving hearts.

*A Danger of the Retreat*

At all events, whatever sins of the tongue your conscience reproaches you with, you now have the best opportunity of atoning for all of them by the religious observance of the retreat silence as a propitiatory sacrifice. By it God's anger, however much it may have been provoked by those sins, will be complete-

ly and forever appeased. Think of this when you are tempted to break your retreat, as they say, and indulge your restless and restive tongue. It will render silence more gratifying and so much easier of observance. Those who ignore this advice and pay no attention at all to the injunction of silence, not only run a risk of nullifying their whole retreat, but, owing to the peculiar conditions prevailing in the retreat, they may sin more by the tongue in the short period of the retreat than they sinned during the entire preceding year.

*Your Weakness*

Secondly, since your tongue is likely your weakness, to speak the language of the times, you can now, during the retreat, make a solid test of the control you can exercise over it when you go out with all your heart to do so. Although St. James plainly asserts that no man can tame the tongue, he at the same time admits, at least implicity, that "the things that are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke, 18, 27). Show yourself and the community that with God's help you can tame your tongue for a week or more without a single flop. Then you will inferentially have the sweet and soothing satisfaction that for the time being you are

a perfect woman and a perfect nun, according to the other utterance of St. James: "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." No doubt you have repeatedly sighed in your heart: "Oh, for one single day of real perfection! What should I not give for it! And what a delicious thrill it would be!" You can easily provide yourself with this thrill of thrills, according to the recipe of St. James, by not offending in word or, to express it differently, by closely keeping the silence of the retreat.

*Recover Control*

In the third place, by once more taming your tongue thoroughly in the retreat you can recover the control you lost over it through your heedlessness and levity of the past. By regaining and consistently maintaining this control over it, you will have reacquired one of the most powerful and valuable assets of a successful and happy religious life. Excluding from our present consideration the spiritual defects traceable to the tongue which we recounted before, we cannot but own that most of the worries and annoyances that harass Sisters in convents, and for a time and in a degree cast a cloud of some kind over their lives, and remind them vividly that they are living in a valley

of tears, are due to the extravagance and irregularity of the tongue. Either the individuals in question have not properly kept their tongue in check, or others let theirs run loose with regard to them.

### "*Full of Deadly Poison*"

At any rate, the greater proportion of displeasures and discomfitures among nuns are caused by the tongue. In nunneries as well as elsewhere the tongue threatens to be "an unquiet evil, full of deadly poison . . . a fire, a world of iniquity" (James, 3, *passim*). You will therefore insure yourself against much tribulation and perturbation of mind and heart if in the retreat you again recover, by the conscientious observance of the retreat silence, the full mastery of your tongue.

Moreover, if you prudently continue the silence you relearn in the retreat, you will improve your reputation for wisdom in your community and your professional surroundings according to the Bible which says: "The wise man will hold his peace" (Prov., 11, 12). Maybe you forfeited your reputation for wisdom and tact among the Sisters mainly through talking too much. The best way to regain it is by applying the contrary method of a prudent silence, indicative of self-control and good sense. There is a meed

of consolation for all of us in these inspired words: "Even a fool, if he will hold his peace, shall be counted wise: and if he close his lips, a man of understanding" (Prov., 17, 28).

*The Converse With God*

When the apostles shut themselves off from every contact with the world, and even shunned all unnecessary converse with one another, to be in full expectancy of the advent of the Spirit of God, they found it easy and quite natural to be "persevering in prayer". In communion with God they sought what entertainment, gratification, and strength their hearts required. If their silence towards men had not been followed by their converse with God, it would have meant nothing for their welfare. The less they conversed with men, the more time and inclination they had to speak to God.

The only reason you are asked to observe a silent attitude towards your Sisters during the retreat is that you may devote yourself unreservedly to your audience or interview with God in prayer. This interview is to last, without interruption, from the beginning to the end of the retreat. It is to be a period of non-intermittent communion with your heavenly Bridegroom. You are directed by

the retreat program to pray all the time either publicly or privately. The bell will be calling you to exercises of piety day in and day out, and whenever it gives you no orders for a public prayer you are bidden to fill out the intervals between the general exercises by your private devotions.

*A Real Exercise*

No one denies that this is no slight stress on the body and mind. Because it involves a considerable strain all round the retreat is properly called "the spiritual exercises". It is a veritable exercise, drawing on the virtue and will-power of the retreatants almost to the point of heroism. Yet the strain grows less taxing in its demands, and even becomes sweet in its rendering, when the retreatant recalls the threefold purpose of all the retreat exercises; which purpose assumes a signal prominence with reference to prayer.

There will hardly be a Sister who has not some remissness, coldness, or neglect to atone for regarding her prayers since her previous retreat. Probably you wilfully and listlessly passed up your prayers. At first you omitted your personal and merely optional prayers. You had been saying them regularly and fervently for years and years. You had grown specially fond of them and had much

confidence in them in view of the splendid results you achieved by them in your struggle for perfection. Since your last retreat you were for the first time induced, not through necessity but from self-indulgence, to reduce and gradually to give up entirely those splendid prayers which played so important a part in a great portion of your religious life. The omission was altogether in your disfavor.

*Sliding Back*

Perhaps you went even further and used every pretext — we are not reflecting upon those Sisters who for solid reasons of health or vocational duties are duly excused by their superiors from the obligation of certain prayers or methods of prayer — to exempt yourself unjustifiably from the prayers which every Sister in the community from time immemorial has been and is reciting conscientiously, although aware of the truth that they do not bind under sin or are not even prescribed in any way. The fact, however, that every Sister loves and recites them is of itself a guarantee of their peculiar efficacy on behalf of the Sisters of the order or society; and to forego them without sufficient cause is rather a sign of tepidity than of fervor, and more of an indication that one is sliding back from than moving towards perfection.

*An Alarming Symptom*

From this neglect the next dangerous step is usually the voluntary omission of those daily exercises of prayer which are enjoined by the rule and the program of the daily cloistral duties, such as the meditation, the examen of conscience, the assistance at Holy Mass, the recitation of the divine office, and the like. Although even these exercises are not individually binding under pain of sin, the wanton neglect of them again and again discovers a weakness in the strife after perfection, and for this reason it is seldom, if ever, free from every venial sin. And the spiritual attitude of which it is an alarming symptom is full of menace for the individual afflicted with it. Almost every case of final apostasy begins with this fatal neglect of prayer. And, on the contrary, no normal person, who preserves the spirit of prayer by practicing prayer consistently according to the traditions of her order, ever loses her holy vocation.

*A Crafty Strategist*

The devil is known to be a great and very acute spiritual strategist. In addition to his keen native knowledge of psychology he has accumulated a vast experience in attacking and defeating souls of all kinds for a

period of six thousand years. He has dealt with ever so many souls closely resembling yours in every way. They had your gifts and parts, your faults and foibles, your environment and temptations, your ruling passion, your penchants and weaknesses. The combat in which you and he are engaged is new to you but old to him. In this point, then, he has a decided advantage over you.

One thing he has learned in the age-long war he has waged upon souls is that the best and only way to overcome them finally is to cut them off from their base of spiritual supplies and ammunition. This base of supplies for the soul is God and His spiritual treasure house. The ordinary means of communication with this base on the part of the soul is prayer. Hence, the devil is aware, the more he can induce the soul to discontinue prayer the more prospect he has of getting her in his power. It is he, therefore, who uses all kinds of devices to tempt the soul of a Religious to forego first one kind of prayer and then another, as was described above. If the Sister who is so tempted would but realize that it is the enemy of her soul who suggests to her the omission, or the hasty and superficial recitation of prayer, she would be less inclined to yield to him, fearful, as she would justly be, of the spiritual catas-

trophe that would be the final issue of her gradual weakening in, and her ultimate omission of prayer.

*Machine Prayers*

It is quite likely that throughout the entire year you do not recollect a single omission of prayer on your part. Still your conscience may reprove you with having paid insufficient heed to the words of the Bible: "Before prayer prepare thy soul: and be not as a man that tempteth God" (Ecclus. 18, 23). Your prayers were often without attention, devotion, and warmth. They were recited mechanically on the order of the machine prayers of the ignorant and superstitious people of the Orient. They were said with wilful distractions and evident signs of impatience and ennui. You spent the periods of the meditation as much or possibly more in a sleeping or dozing than in a waking and an alert condition.

Anyway, you feel you have much to atone for in regard to prayer, the fundamental duty of religious life, and for the wholehearted pursuit of which you mainly entered the convent. Your unjustified absence from the community exercises, or your lack of promptness in appearing at them, besides the forfeiture of your own spiritual emolument, also

involved an element of pronounced disedification to the community which you are bound to undo. The retreat, with its compact and rigorous round of devotional duties from early morning until late at night, gives you a splendid opportunity to make whatever compensation you owe God for past indifference and irregularity in adhering, according to your condition and capacity, to the daily series of conventual exercises of devotion.

*A Superior's Responsibility*

This reflection must appeal to and solace you even more if as a superior of the community you failed in your very important duty of maintaining the practice and spirit of prayer in the cloister, either by not keeping the prescribed exercises faithfully, or by your unjustified personal absence from or neglect of them. In either case you have much to make good, and you ought to feel thoroughly relieved to have so favorable an opportunity of doing it as the retreat offers you. A superior must have very outstanding other gifts, indeed, to be able to maintain herself creditably in her position in spite of her absence at the community exercises, or her lack of a prudent and firm insistence on their observance by her subjects.

*You Go Strong*

Furthermore, by holding close to the retreat program and throwing your entire soul into the prayers it enjoins, you will be able to test yourself thoroughly in the paramount occupation of a Religious. If you find you can still go strong in it, once you set your mind to do so, you have every reason for humble self-congratulation. Finally, by pursuing prayer insistently and untiringly in the whole course of the retreat, you can regain the gift of prayer in so high a degree and with so much vigor that there will be little danger lest you lose the spirit of it when the retreat is over. And by once more obeying promptly and cheerfully every call of the retreat bell from early morning until late at night, you will steel yourself again in that ready obedience and precious punctuality which are a part of every true Religious. If the retreat would not accomplish anything else in your regard this one boon alone would have to be accounted a great blessing of God unto you. A Religious lives as she prays. If your prayer is godly, your entire life will have the same character: you will live in God, by God, with God, and for God.

# LECTURE VIII.

## The Soul's Rest

*"They were all filled with the Holy Ghost"* (Acts, 2, 4).

The striking, varied, and comprehensive operations of the Holy Spirit in the soul of the retreatant are beautifully enumerated in the masterly and inspiring sequence or hymn which the Church chants or recites after the epistle of the Mass on Pentecost Day. It begins with the words: "Veni sancte Spiritus:" "Come Holy Ghost." It will benefit us not a little by giving us a clearer insight into the functions of the Holy Ghost regarding the soul of a Religious if, by way of illustration, we now ponder on the deep and soothing meaning of one of the strophes of the sequence. In Latin it reads: "In labore requies; in aestu temperies; in fletu solatium." "In labor Thou art rest; in heat Thou art refreshment; in weeping Thou art solace."

### *Nuns Work*

In the retreat the Holy Ghost is to the soul rest in labor. Our nuns work hard. Their days begin early and end late. They have no so-called union hours; or an eight-

hour day; or a five and a half day week. Nor do they get double pay for overtime. In their professional work as teachers, or nurses, or charity or social workers, in a direct or indirect capacity, their motto in the interest of the souls under their charge is that of St. Paul: "I seek not the things that are yours, but you . . . I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls" (2 Cor., 12, 15).

*He Took Time Off*

But the best and holiest work for others is in danger of becoming excessive or, rather, one-sided, and consequently a menace to the salvation of the worker himself. The same St. Paul sensed this peril and was not slow in guarding against it as he confessed, saying: "I chastise my body and bring it into subjection: lest, perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway" (1 Cor., 9, 27). His preaching could not have been more disinterested, fervent, and apostolic. Yet he took time off from his preaching to chastise his body, or to attend to his own personal spiritual needs, in order that he himself would not become a castaway while he was leading ever so many others to heaven. A physician can devote himself to the cure of others with such unbounded zeal that he himself dies from wear and ex-

haustion. An accountant may so tire his brain by balancing the books of others that it becomes unbalanced and disqualified to attend to his own finances. Similarly a Sister may dedicate herself so intently to the salvation of those under her charge either by appointment or through her personal choice that she has no effort and consecration left for her own immortal soul.

*She Neglects Herself*

The blasphemous words which His enemies hurled at our dying Savior: "He saved others: Himself He cannot save" (Matt., 27, 42), may unfortunately be verified regarding a nun who works too much or so indiscreetly in the interest of the salvation of others that she thereby neglects her own salvation. Judas saved others while he was spiritually declining and ruining himself. Had he lifted his eyes and heart to God as he bade others to do it, he would have become a saint instead of the murderer of God.

There will be those, no doubt, who will miss a Sister and her services while she is in her retreat. They will dislike to see her go, even as Laban loathed to see Jacob depart from him. He said to Jacob, in order to keep him in his service: "Let me find favor in

thy sight: I have learned by experience, that God hath blessed me for thy sake. Appoint thy wages which I shall give thee. But he answered: Thou knowest how I have served thee . . . and the Lord hath blessed thee at my coming. It is reasonable therefore that I should now provide also for my own house" (Gen., 30, 27-30). Every Sister in view of her retreat, no matter how pressing and multifarious her vocational work may be, has the best reasons in the world to say: "It is reasonable, yea, mandatory, therefore, that I should now provide also for my own house."

*Her Higher Influence*

Far from suffering a loss through her temporary absence her charges will be the beneficiaries of her spiritual gain in the retreat. Here the words of Jesus to His disciples apply: "I tell you the truth: it is expedient to you that I go. For if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you: but if I go, I will send Him to you" (John, 16, 7). Everyone under her influence will be the better for the Sister's reception of the plenitude of the Holy Ghost. Her work of mere teaching or nursing may be unaffected by her possession or non-possession of the Holy

Ghost: but her spiritual or higher influence on her wards will be the more potent the more she herself is under the sway of the Spirit of God.

*Nirvana*

The Church is wise and solicitous therefore in asking all Religious to take a spiritual recess from their vocational duties in order to apply their whole solicitude and care upon their own soul during this period of hallowed rest. The retreat is therefore not a passive but an active rest. It is not to consist of relaxation, slumber, and sleep, pure and simple. Nor is it to be like the Nirvana of the Buddhists in which the soul is to be numb, inert, joyless, painless, and lifeless. But the retreat is designed to be an active rest in the sense that the Religious are to relax completely from all the worries and anxieties of the burdens and responsibilities in the interest of others that daily weigh down upon them. Instead of attending to them they are to engage themselves sweetly, yet earnestly, with the care of the affairs of their own soul and its prospects to attain heaven.

*The Rest of the Night*

Viewed in this light the retreat may be likened to various kinds of rest in vogue

among men for the refreshment and restoration of body and soul. There is the rest of the night. The Sunday rest. The rest of the yearly vacation. With everyone of these the retreat has something in common and influences the soul, through the grace of the Holy Ghost, as a power of a new spiritual creation.

St. Francis de Sales used to say that every night God wrought a little miracle in his behalf. No matter how fagged, exhausted, and dilapidated in body and mind he went to bed the night previous, as he awoke in the morning from a healthy sleep he was a new man, teeming with strength, vibrant with energy, and bubbling over with a love of life. God works a similar miracle upon every nun who enters the retreat with a good will. Through various influences during the year she was much taken to task in body and soul, tired out, warped, shriveled, and shrunk in her dreams of perfection and aspirations of holiness and the idealistic conceptions of her holy calling.

*"Behold a Nun!"*

In her regard the words Pilate said of Jesus come to mind: "Behold a man!" With reference to herself she is tempted to exclaim: "Behold a nun! What a mere shadow of one! What a pitiful remnant of one! What a sad

ruin of one! How different from the nun I once knew in the novitiate and the first years of her religious fervor! How different from the one I knew a year ago in the retreat and especially at the end of it! Formerly so optimistic: now so pessimistic! Once so hopeful, resilient, and resourceful: now so diffident, depressed, and despairing! At one time so enthusiastic, fervent, and unflinching: now so drooping, tepid, and craven!"

If she has confidence in God and trusts in the strength of the Spirit of Jesus, the retreat will restore her completely to her former and better self, not only as the night rebuilds the powers of the body and mind, but also as the rest of three days in the grave, speaking metaphorically, of course, prepared the body of Jesus for a glorious resurrection which made it prettier and mightier than it had ever been before. Such will be the effect of the retreat upon the soul of the Religious who surrenders herself entirely to the recreative power of the Third Person of the Most Blessed Trinity.

*A Wondrous Transformation*

In an applied sense, what St. Paul says of the effects of the resurrection of the body is verified in the case of a Religious going through the process of a good retreat. The

Apostle says: "It is sown in corruption: it shall rise in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor: it shall rise in glory. It is sown in weakness: it shall rise in power. It is sown a natural body: it shall rise a spiritual body . . . The first man was, of the earth, earthly: the second man, from heaven, heavenly. Therefore, as we have borne the image of the earthly, let us bear also the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor., 15, 42 *sqq*).

Even abstracting from the divine ordinance given on Mt. Sinai which solemnly enjoined it, the weekly rest of a day is a great boon to mankind as regards its bodily and spiritual welfare. The Church changed the observance of the Sabbath to that of the Sunday which is now being kept as a day of rest by practically all the Christian and civilized nations of the world. This day of rest from servile work is to keep men from being entirely immersed in the things of the body, and to give them the necessary leisure to pay attention to the affairs of the soul. If it is conscientiously observed, not only as a day of passive rest but of active rest, inasmuch as it is taken up by energetic care and solicitude for the needs of the spirit, it cannot but prove to be an effective check upon cupidity and the inordinate attachment to this world and promote the higher and better things of life.

*He Likes Sunday*

A good Christian is glad when Sunday, or the day of the Lord, approaches. While he enjoys his work and renders it cheerfully as a service to God, He prefers to it the direct and unrestrained homage to the Lord which Sunday gives him the opportunity of pursuing to his heart's content. On this day he revolves in his mind the past week with its labor and hardships, its successes and failures. He asks himself whether, in the way of real values to himself and others, he is getting out of his work as much as he is putting into it; whether he is not forgetting or sacrificing greater issues by his excessive devotion to it; or whether he could not perform it in a better and more efficient manner and after a method more profitable to himself and others.

*Is It Worth While?*

The annual rest of the retreat is to serve the same purpose to a good Religious. The Church enjoins it upon her to keep her from becoming overly engrossed in the work of her vocation, however holy it may be in itself, and of forcing her, as it were, to pay exclusive attention to her own soul for a protracted period. If she uses this well she, too, will pass in review the entire past year with all its toils and sacrifices, its good and

evil ventures and adventures, and she will ask herself pertinent questions on this order: Has my work served the object which I was expected to attain by it? Am I myself getting out of it for my personal advancement what it should bring me? Or have I thrown myself into it with such abandon as to become oblivious of my soul's interest in its pursuit? Is it really worth my while to be so much worried about my work for others or the community when it is the cause of my being too little worried about my own self and my prospects for the future life? Are there not certain things or ways about my work which I could modify in the interest of its improvement and of better and more gratifying results for myself and others?

*Are There Lazy Sisters?*

While there are some Sisters — very few, thank God — who are lazy, shiftless, and thriftless, the danger for the ordinary Sister lies more in the direction of too much than of too little devotion to her vocational work. She is inclined to be too eager, alas, not always without the sinister motive of human respect or of ogling after a higher position, to succeed with her work. In consequence, as the soul has just a certain amount of energy and concentration to dispose of, the

Sister who expends herself inordinately upon her professional work for others has less than she should have left to devote to her own spiritual care and progress. It is after all quite human and entirely natural to be ready to yield to the inclination of attending more to the spiritual needs of others than to one's own.

*Preaching is Easier than Doing*

It is less disagreeable—so wayward is our unregenerate nature—to preach to or teach and train others than ourselves. When you are tutoring, advising, or correcting others you are in so far in a position of superiority which cannot but flatter you somehow. You are assuming an attitude of knowing more of a particular subject and, relatively, of being better grounded in a peculiar virtue, than the person you are instructing or upbraiding. This insensibly gratifies your self-love, vanity, conceit, and pride.

Whereas, if you have to take cognizance of your own faults and set about amending them, your self-love and vanity are wounded. You feel hurt, strained, and uncomfortable. You like to have the ordeal over with as soon as possible, even though in your heart of hearts you must admit that this occupation, when sincerely, fearlessly, and consist-

ently pursued, is far and away the most profitable you can engage in. You are not the only Sister, however, who finds it harder and more unpleasant to attend to the examination of her own conscience, say for the space of fifteen minutes, than to nurse the sick or teach children for three or four consecutive hours.

*A Mixed Marriage*

The same psychological phenomenon explains why Sisters at times can be most eloquent and insistent in trying to bring about the conversion of others while they pay little or no heed to the conversion that would be highly desirable in their own case. Take as an example the nun who has a girl patient or a pupil in the high school, or a relative or friend, who is in imminent danger of contracting a perilous mixed marriage which in the girl's particular case would bode nothing but evil in every way. The good nun speaks to the young lady in so sympathetic, unctuous, persuasive, and irresistible a manner, portraying to her drastically and tragically all the danger she is courting for body and soul by her ill-advised love affair, that the girl finally surrenders to her nun friend's kindly, well-meant, and well-taken remonstrances, and breaks her engagement at once and forever.

*She Saved Another's Soul*

The Sister rejoices and congratulates herself on having saved a soul. And well she may. But, who knows, perhaps she herself has something in her own life fraught with equal peril like the condition which faced her girl friend. It may be some serious irregularity she is guilty of anent one of the vows: she may have contracted the habit of receiving and disposing of money or other articles without the necessary leave of the superior; or of acting with an almost defiant and rebellious independence in the face of the most lawful and sacred demands of obedience; or of dallying with sentimental or sensuous gratifications, in thought, word, desire, or deed, regarding herself or others, of the same or the opposite sex, in jeopardy of the holy virtue; or of behaving toward a subject with unfeigned coldness, hardness, and injustice; or of violating the code of sisterly charity by a sullen, forbidding, and irreconcilable attitude; or of omitting her prayers grossly, carelessly, and remorselessly; or of receiving the sacraments unworthily and sacrilegiously.

*Why Not Save Her Own Soul?*

Whatever her spiritual plight may be: if she turned upon herself with the same warmth, directness, aggressiveness, and de-

termination to succeed as she turned upon the girl in our supposition, she would not merely save the soul of another, but her own soul, which means immeasurably more to her than any other soul or all the other souls taken together. That this may come home to every nun in time and in the degree in which she requires it, the Church wants her to lay off, so to say, for a week or more, in order that she may attend to and be busy with herself alone in the presence of God.

Many good Catholics, when on the Lord's Day they rehearse in their minds the events and their conduct of the previous week, have reasons for virtuous self-congratulation and humble thanksgiving to God for the good fortune they have had in bodily as well as spiritual matters and, especially, for the many merits they succeeded in accumulating in heaven through the week. The thought of this fills them with the sweetest consolation in view of the week that is past and with comforting hope regarding the week that is ahead. Most Religious in the annual retreat have abundant reasons to entertain the same holy and gratifying sentiments in a high degree. Nothing gives them greater confidence for the future than their consoling experiences of the past. The more God helped, protected, and furthered them in days gone by the surer

they are of His continued assistance, protection, and blessing in the days that are still to come.

*He Was Never Tired*

A man who asked a farmer to hire him gave as his peculiar recommendations that he never grew tired, or hungry, or sleepy. This characterization appealed to the thrifty farmer and he engaged the applicant. He started him out by sending him into the forest to chop wood. About an hour or two later he went to see how his new employee was getting on. He was surprised to find him sitting on a log and resting leisurely. He said to him: "You told me you never grow tired. Now you are resting already." The man replied: "It is true that I never grow tired, or hungry, or sleepy. The reason is, I always rest before I am tired, I eat before I am hungry, I sleep before I become sleepy."

Irritating as this answer no doubt was to the employer, the words of it contain good sense when applied to the spiritual life. A sensible Religious never allows herself to grow spiritually tired, hungry, and sleepy. She is careful to forestall these dangerous eventualities by amply providing herself betimes with what spiritual rest and food she requires.

*Filled with the Holy Ghost*

In her annual retreat, if she makes it well, a good Religious can store away in her soul so much spiritual food and strength that she will run no risk of spiritual inanition or weakness until her next retreat. In their retreat the apostles were *filled* with the Holy Ghost. Hence His benign influence lasted and served them unto their death. She will only have to blame herself for it if a nun is not similarly filled with the Spirit of God in her retreat.

*Sudden Wealth*

To be filled with the Holy Spirit it is above all necessary that a nun's soul be empty of sinful self-love and of every inordinate attachment to creatures. The following story, which I hope will not be indelicate in connection with so sacred a subject, will illustrate the point we are considering.

A poor laborer who had worked hard all his life suddenly came by a very large sum of money through an unlooked-for inheritance. After he got possession of the money he was beside himself with joy and said: "I have been a poor man and lived like a poor man long enough. Now I am a rich man, and I will live like a rich man, and eat, and dress, and act like a rich man."

*A Fashionable Restaurant*

He entered a fashionable restaurant and asked to be served the best meal they had, regardless of the cost. The waiter handed him the menu card which was a complete puzzle to him. Unwilling to betray his ignorance, however, he felt he should start ordering from the top of the list so he would miss nothing. The first item of food that met his gaze was "consommé". He ordered it. The waiter brought him a plate of soup. This surprised him. He had eaten so much soup when he was poor that he was convinced it was a poor man's dish. He could not imagine rich people eating soup. He ate the soup, however. He then ordered the next thing in line, which was "bouillon". Again the waiter brought a plate of soup. The astonishment of the guest grew, but he ate the soup as before. His next order was for "purée of peas". Once more the waiter brought soup. By this time the newly-rich patron was quite dumbfounded, seeing that so much soup was served a rich patron. He ate the purée and said to the waiter: "Waiter, I do not understand the things on this card. You do. You have been here a long time. You know how to make up a good dinner. Bring me the best dinner you can think of. I can and will pay for it. I have the money."

*A Wonderful Meal*

The waiter carried out his order and soon covered the table with the choicest viands from antipasto to dessert. When he finished carrying the food, the guest looked over the palatable and inviting dishes rather regretfully, saying: "That is a wonderful meal, indeed. But what are you going to do with it, when you are full of soup?"

In like manner the reason why some nuns, coming, as it were, to the sumptuous and generous banquet table of the Holy Ghost, spread for them in the retreat, derive little or no benefit from the grand heavenly food that is offered them is this: their soul is and stays filled with sentiments of self-gratification and intemperate affections for creatures. If they dismissed and forwent them entirely and finally the Spirit of God would supply their souls with a perennial banquet of the choicest celestial nourishment.

*The Annual Vacation*

The annual vacation, which is coming more and more into general usage, has several points of resemblance with the annual retreat of Religious. As a rule people yearn for this vacation with eager impatience as a relief from the routine of their daily work, and as a com-

plete mental and bodily relaxation. They are convinced their vacation will build them up again and give them a new zest for their work and a new joy of living altogether. They like to spend their vacation, if possible, away from their habitual surroundings, and in the course of it they like to rest, roam, and frolic just as they please. Within honorable bounds they want to be themselves, live their own life, and go after their favorite pursuits without let or hindrance.

With all that their vacation is usually not a passive but a very active rest. They often work much harder, or are under a greater mental, corporal, and emotional strain during vacation than throughout the year. Yet it is a rest and relaxation for them at that simply because it implies a change from their ordinary occupations and environment, and what they do is a matter not of compulsion or necessity but of their own sweet pleasure and voluntary choice.

*Vacation Stories*

Here lies all the difference. They can do things they very much like to do, but which they have not the time or the opportunity to do save in their vacation. Hence they throw themselves into the enjoyment of them with

their whole heart and soul and, provided they use moderation and common sense, they are the better for it corporally as well as mentally. There is nothing in the entire year they dwell on with more fondness and delight, either in anticipation or reminiscence, than their annual vacation. They enjoy exchanging the stories of their wondrous vacation experiences with their companions, relatives, and friends. They never tire living these interesting and helpful experiences over and over again in fancy, memory, and story. Each recollection of them seems to renew the first salutary effects of them.

*A New Retreat-Master*

In the spiritual life of a good Religious the annual retreat plays a similar role. For her it is the one outstanding period of the year in her eager expectation as well as in her fond memory of it. It is her most joyful, solacing, profitable, and grateful season. She yearns for it long before its arrival, not so much because it means a temporary cessation of her arduous vocational duties; or because it will bring her away from her accustomed and into a new unused environment; or because she expects a certain diversion and healthy amusement in meeting the Sisters whom she has not seen

for a long time; or because she will hear a new retreat-master lecture and dispense his views of the religious life: — these are all more or less concomitant sentiments, perfectly honorable in their way, in every good nun that looks forward to the annual retreat:— but the dominant note in her eagerness for it is the thought that in the retreat she can give herself unreserved to a good time in a spiritual sense, and indulge without restraint in mystical revelry with the divine Spouse of her soul.

*All Alone With Jesus*

She can then do what she often wished during the year she might be able to do: be alone with Jesus to her heart's content; listen to Him as He speaks to her heart; speak to Him in her turn with all the child-like simplicity, familiarity, and candor of her soul, and in the meanwhile let the rest of the world go by. She will be as in a trance of devotion and in a transport of love. But one fear will beset her heart in the retreat: that it will fleet along too soon and end when she is hardly conscious it has begun, even as agreeable vacations are known to do.

As St. Anthony of Egypt chid the rising sun for announcing to him the end of the

prayer he thought he had just commenced, although he had started it the evening previous, so the papal blessing which is imparted by the retreat-master at the end of a retreat always seems premature to the good nun as ending but too soon the delicious tryst she has been enjoying with her Beloved and which, it appears to her, has hardly got well under way.

*The Time Seems Short*

Even as before God a thousand years are as one day, so to her the eight days of the retreat are but as a single moment. And when she has to quit the retreat she sighs with the Psalmist: "How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God. . . Thy altars, O Lord of hosts: My King and my God. . . Better is one day in Thy courts above thousands. . . O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee" (Ps. 83, 2 sqq.).

After the retreat the fervent Religious loves to recall and revolve in her mind the various spiritual experiences of it: the attitude of Jesus towards her, and of herself towards Jesus; the mutual exchanges of

demonstrations of affection, devotion, gratitude, generosity, and love that were passed between her and her heavenly Spouse; the reciprocal whispers of sacred confidence, and the repeated assurances, of one to the other, of undying attachment and inseparable union. These and similar features of the retreat continue to take life in her fancy day and night, for months and months, to renew in her once more all the consolations and holy impulses of the retreat, and to stir anew all the love of her heart for the Bridegroom of her soul.

*First on the List*

Small wonder, then, that she evaluates the annual retreat so highly and gives it the first place on the list of all the weeks of the year. As far as prudence warrants it she also delights in speaking over the public phases of the retreat with her fellow Sisters throughout the entire year. Together they discuss the points of the lectures or the public reading which particularly impressed them, and on which they are glad to have an exchange of opinion. They expatiate naturally and spontaneously on the revelation the retreat contained for them anent the excellences and advantages of religious life, and the stimulus it furnished them to make the most of their

signal advantage of having been called to it by God, through His sheer goodness and love, in preference to so many other girls and women. As much as they are grateful for the favors of the past retreat so longingly do they begin to look forward again to their next retreat: even as people who have enjoyed a perfect vacation hardly resume their ordinary work when they join with their praises of the past vacation their ardent desire and forecasts of the next one. Of a truth: "In labor Thou art rest."

*They Are "Peppier"*

People returning from a vacation trip like to be complimented on their splendid appearance, and to be told that they look ever so much younger, sprightlier, and, as they now say, "peppier" than before. It is not a sinful ambition by any means for a nun to desire to make the same impression in a spiritual way upon her companions and acquaintances when she returns from her retreat. But she wants this impression to be real and genuine and replete with edification.

The aforesaid remarks made to ex-vacationists are often merely complimentary and are said from sheer courtesy and a desire to make the addressees feel good, even though

there is little or no objective foundation for the flattering comments. A Sister, however, returning from a retreat, desires that people really mean it when regarding her they say within or among themselves: "Sister A. has visibly improved and become holier than before. How wonderfully composed, humble, meek, patient, and resigned she is! What piety she has acquired, what marvelous charity, and astounding unselfishness!"

*A Left-Handed Compliment*

Whether it is mere imagination, or what they call a left-handed compliment, it may not be easy to decide: but people are known at times to say of their pastor that he preaches better when he returns from a retreat than he did before. If your retreat is well made similar remarks, candidly passed, will be in order regarding the preaching qualities of your conduct after the retreat. The Sisters and others should say, for example: "Sister B. is much more attentive to her work than she used to be; easier to get on with; less gossipy and garrulous in general, and particularly more reserved and reticent regarding the secrets of the community and the house towards outsiders. As a docile, grateful, respectful, and loving subject she

now is unsurpassed. On her part, Sister C., her superior, has also changed much for the better. She has put away that ultra-sensitiveness and suspiciousness that made her regime quite unpleasant. She has become big and broad in her motherly sympathy for the Sisters, truly magnanimous, and irresistibly lovable to everyone of them."

What a wonderful power one retreat can have! The injection of a single new trait or of the longing for it, or the elimination of but one obnoxious feature of character, can mean all the difference between failure and success, between disappointment and prosperity, between mediocrity and sublime sanctity in the career of a Religious.

*She Advertises the Retreat*

When people notice that a person has prospered much by spending a vacation in a certain way or in a special place they at once conceive a desire of enjoying a similar profitable vacation themselves. The conduct of a nun, therefore, returning from a good retreat, will of itself beget in those who observe her considerable spiritual improvement the wish to make a like retreat to their own soul's benefit.

A non-Catholic minister, a chaplain of a penitentiary, while bidding goodbye to a

convict whose time in the institution was up, said feelingly: "My good friend, always remember what I told you in my sermon last Sunday, and be careful never to come here again." The now ex-convict replied just as pathetically, saying: "Your reverence, trust me. Whoever heard you talk never wants to come to this place again."

A good Sister, of course, has just the contrary sentiments regarding her retreat. Whatever may be her appraisal of the individual retreat-master and his manner of preaching a retreat, even when she is finishing one retreat she is already yearning for the following one.

I hope the comparison will not sound frivolous and disrespectful to religious life: but vacations away from home are known to be occasions of silly, short-lived, and not infrequently of dangerous romances and fatal amorous adventures. Somehow the very leisure, rest, and diversion of a vacation incline the heart to become sentimental and to hunger for love.

Only in a good and wholesome sense does a nun experience this urge and longing in a retreat. Far from being decoyed into a dangerous and adulterous love, she grows more and more welded to her divine Lover in the purest and most loyal love. Instead

of indulging a transitory emotionalism for one whom she sees today and will forget tomorrow, she retrenches herself as much as possible in her undying attachment "to the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God . . . forever and ever" (1 Tim., 1, 17). In the best sense of the word she will say to Jesus in and after every retreat: "You have brought a new kind of love to me: grander, more delicious, more all-possessing, more inspiring, and more entrancing than any love I have ever before experienced even for You, my Spouse, my Lord, and my God."

*The Rest of Heaven*

There is another kind of rest with which the sacred rest of the retreat may be said to have some resemblance. It is the anticipated rest of heaven. In her sacred liturgy the Church calls heaven the "seat of refreshment" and "the blessedness of rest". It is the rest of the faithful soldier who has fought a good fight; of the successful athlete who has finished his course; of the loyal confessor who has kept the faith; of the faithful servant to whom the Lord the just judge has rendered the crown of justice (*vid.* 2 Tim., 4, 7 *sqq.*). No rest is sweeter than this. The retreat rest of a good Religious is a foretaste and a

preparatory stage of this heavenly rest. The foretaste of it is to make her fall so much in love with it that she resolves to attain the rest of heaven at any cost.

*A Contest in Humility*

In the life of St. John Baptist Vianney we read that one day the world-famous Dominican preacher Lacordaire paid a visit to the holy pastor of Ars. The saint invited Lacordaire to preach in his church. The celebrated pulpit orator demurred, saying that he had not come to preach but to listen to the sermon of the man of God. But the holy man would not take a negative answer. Finally Lacordaire consented to preach if the sainted pastor would address the people first so those who had come to hear him preach would not be disappointed. Vianney was agreeable to this proposal. He preached with his usual unction and resistless persuasiveness like one who was inspired from above. After his brief talk he introduced the distinguished visitor by means of a story.

*St. Catherine Sings*

He said that a holy hermit in the desert had but one desire in this life, and that was to hear our Blessed Mother sing. One day,

after he had pleaded most fervently with God to grant him his heart's one wish, he suddenly saw a lady of supernatural charm and ethereal beauty, and he heard her heavenly voice singing with ineffable sweetness. The ravishment that seized him in consequence of this celestial music was so strong that he was on the point of swooning away for joy when the singing ceased. Then the lady said to him in tones of liquid suavity: "You think I am the Blessed Mother. But I am only St. Catherine. The Blessed Mother will sing presently." The saint applied this story by proceeding in his charming simplicity, after this manner: "You have just heard me preach. You liked it. But I am only St. Catherine. Now you will hear the Blessed Mother, when Father Lacordaire addresses you."

*She Fancies She Is in Heaven*

The story may be far fetched, but in a similar way the good Religious, who is at times so charmed with the spiritual rest of the retreat that she fancies she is in heaven and enjoying the eternal rest of God, will eventually be reminded that she is not yet in heaven but merely in the vestibule of it. This will induce her to say: If the rest in the vestibule is so sweet, soothing, and beatify-

ing, what will the rest in the everlasting mansions of God be! And she will sigh with the Psalmist: "As the heart panteth after the fountains of water; so my soul panteth after Thee, O God. My soul hath thirsted after the strong living God. When shall I come and appear before the face of God?" (Ps. 41, 2, 3.)

# LECTURE IX.

## The Soul's Refreshment

> "*They were all filled with the Holy Ghost*" (Acts, 2, 4).

It happens that today, as I am writing this, a torrid heat wave, joined with oppressive humidity and lasting several days that seemed endless, was finally broken by a cool and refreshing rain. Everybody welcomed and rejoiced over the relief brought by the change of temperature. It operated favorably on body and soul. It chased lethargy and brought back energy to everyone. It banished depression of spirits and recalled buoyancy and good cheer. It instilled a new love for work and revived the spirit of wholesome enterprise.

### *A Cool Wave*

What a cool and refreshing wave does in a period of excessive heat, the Holy Ghost does during the retreat in a spiritual way to a soul suffering from an undue heat of the spirit. "In aestu temperies:" "In heat Thou art refreshment." By an undue heat of the spirit is meant any inordinate passion that overtaxes, oppresses, and wears out the

spirit. By engaging the spirit intemperately for some created being, this heat turns it away from or at least lessens its love for the Uncreated Being. If this heat is not quenched or properly moderated betimes it threatens to incapacitate the soul for its life's work on earth and to render its mundane sojourn miserable and bitter; and, what is infinitely worse, it threatens to dispose the soul for its assigment to an unspeakable and inextinguishable fire in eternity. Whoever has any apprehension of this trend of inordinate passion appreciates and is grateful for Him Who in heat is refreshment.

*The Ruling Passion*

Being ordinary human beings, Religious are by no means immune from being infested by sinful passions. Everyone is more or less troubled with his or her ruling or predominant passion. This is the passion that prevails in a given person and is directly or indirectly the source of all or nearly all the person's failings. It either controls the person to a greater or lesser extent, or is aiming at gaining this control in the person's conscious, subconscious and unconscious moments. This passion varies according to the corporal and mental disposition of the person; and even when the same kind of passion possesses

different persons it varies in intensity and manner of operation in all of them.

*Inordinate Ambition*

Let us take as an illustration of the refreshing influence of the Holy Spirit upon a soul, tortured by spiritual heat, the case of a nun who comes to the retreat possessed by the passion of inordinate ambition. Of itself ambition is not bad. As every other passion, or strong appetite for something encompassing our entire nature, it is implanted by God in our heart and mind for good and noble purposes. As long as it is made to serve these purposes with due moderation it remains virtuous and good. Your order would be non-existent; your religious garb would never have been seen on earth; the convent you live in would not be standing; the province of which you are a member would never have been called into life; no retreat-master, for that matter, would ever preach a retreat to you; and this very book you are now reading or listening to as it is being read by another would have never been written, had it not been for the passion of ambition inflaming those who were responsible for the things mentioned. The drags on the real and substantial progress of religious life in its best phases, and the brakes on the most desirable

prosperity of every religious community are the members who are altogether bereft of ambition. They are to the convent what the drones are in the bee hive; the limp or paralyzed members to the bodily organism; and the barnacles to the ship.

*It's a Work*

Of the plenitude of the sacred priestly dignity St. Paul says: "A faithful saying: If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (1 Tim., 3, 1). If it is not unlawful to desire and, consequently, honorably to strive after the highest office in the Church, it cannot be illicit to do the same regarding minor ecclesiastical or religious dignities. Whoever does so, however —and directly or indirectly many desire and aspire after some dignity or other—should always bear in mind that St. Paul speaks of desiring a "work". Every worthwhile dignity will sooner or later be found to involve at least as much work, worry, and anxiety as it conveys honor, prestige, and power.

*Love and Ambition*

There is a similarity in urge and results among the passions that sway the human heart. Thus we notice a great resemblance between the passion of love that urges a girl

towards matrimony and the passion of ambition that spurs her towards the acquisition of honor and preeminence. A girl in love dreams dreams, sees visions, and paints marriage to herself as a paradise of delights. It is nature's way of inducing her to undertake cheerfully something that is very hard yet necessary to the human race. When she is really married she gradually becomes more and more disillusioned and realizes that marriage is not mere poetry and romance but a very serious and arduous "work" or responsibility.

Ambition in a woman follows about the same course. It starts by making the most alluring and fascinating promises to its subject. It ends by engaging her in a very serious and difficult enterprise. But even as a conscientious married woman and mother derives solid joy and comfort from her work or burden for human society, so a good nun relishes in the Lord the weight of duties devolving upon her for the benefit of the community and mankind in general.

*A Prayer for the Superiorship*

Did we care to pursue this resemblance further we might ask whether it is lawful for a nun to pray to be promoted to the dignity of superiorship. The answer would be the

same as is given a girl who asks if she may pray for a husband. She surely may; but after her prayer is heard she may be convinced that she was like the disciples who asked Jesus for the highest honors attainable. Jesus did not chide them for asking, nor did He intimate that it was wrong to ask; but He said: "You know not what you ask. Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink?" (Matt., 20,22.) They were convinced they were asking for something very sweet and delicious, while in reality they were asking for something very bitter and tart. The same often applies to the girl praying for what she considers the bliss of married life; as also to the nun asking God to promote her to what she considers the blessedness of being a superior.

*Burning Up With Ambition*

But when ambition goes beyond the bounds of reason and justice it becomes sinful and harmful. When it is not checked in its extravagance it acquires a terrific momentum in the shortest time, and there is no disaster into which it may not thrust the hapless victim who has surrendered to it without reserve. There are Religious, then, who are burning up with the heat of inordinate ambition. They want to forge ahead and get on

top by fair means or foul. There is nothing to which they will not stoop in order to quench their fatuous thirst for preeminence, honor, and power. Sometimes fate, if we may use this term, is kind to their intrigues and scheming, and lands them whither they aspired. But no matter how high they rise, they are never satisfied. In their pride and conceit the devil takes them upon a very high mountain, so to speak, and shows them a world of power and glory which might be within their reach. They are unsatisfied and unhappy until they possess it all; which, of course, seldom happens. Or if they have all they want — an unlikely supposition — they feel unsafe in its preservation, and are miserable in consequence.

*She Soliloquizes*

Oftener than not, however, the inordinately ambitious Sister is not going up as fast and as far as she desires. She is disappointed, disgruntled, and dispirited. Others in the community, so she soliloquizes ever and anon, are moving faster and nicer than she is doing. Some members of her clothing or profession class have been superiors for years, while for her there still seems nothing worth while in sight. Someone is holding her down, apparently, and she is convinced she is not given

a fair chance. She is being slighted and ignored. Her talents and merits are not appreciated today and, as prospects now are, they never will be. Others of lesser gifts, who have deserved not nearly so well as she of the community, are preferred to her without any regard either to justice, or charity, or even common decency. They ingratiated themselves somehow with the higher superiors; or it was simply love at first sight which, without any investigation into merits or qualifications of any kind, induced the superiors to single them out as their pets and favorites and elevate them with a holy or unholy disregard for all the claims of equity and distributive justice.

*In the Depths of Obscurity*

Because she cannot fawn and cringe and toady to those who are higher up, and continually feed them on flattery thickly or thinly disguised, she is left in the depths of obscurity or the valleys of mediocrity while her companions and Sisters, who entered long after she did, rise to the heights of importance and the peaks of eminence in the order. This hurts, chafes, and cuts her in the heart. It casts a pall of gloom over her entire cloistral existence. There is not a waking moment in which, in view of the more fortunate lot of

her fellow Sisters, she does not feel keenly humiliated and injured.

What makes matters worse, she is sure that all the other Sisters are forever wondering why she cannot rise and get somewhere in keeping with her age in the community, and what can be the reason that she keeps on being counted as nobody and reckoned as nothing year after year. There must be something wrong, the Sisters say or think. They venture to point to this, surmise that, or suspect some other sinister thing to account for her being kept in utter lowliness. If they themselves were concerned, they would find no difficulty at all in attributing their hard lot to sheer jealousy and plain injustice: but when she is involved they are sure there must be some serious objective grounds for her humiliation. At all events, the nun in question cannot view herself in any other light but as being unjustly and systematically discriminated against, and publicly penalized without a shadow of justification.

*A Chronic Victim*

As a result of this injured feeling she regrets again and again that she ever saw the habit she is wearing, and she deplores the day on which for the first time she heard the name

of the community of which she is now a member. She is a chronic victim of the heat of inordinate ambition. What she requires most in the retreat is that the Holy Ghost be her refreshment in this heat and moderate it by making her meek and humble of heart even as Jesus, her chosen Bridegroom.

With reference to this subject, which always has been, is, and ever will be a very live one wherever human beings congregate, convents not excepted, a few sane reflections will not be out of order. Of God we read in the Bible: "Thou art just, O Lord: and Thy judgment is right . . . Thy justice is justice forever" (Ps. 118, 137, 142). Of God alone such justice can be predicated. Even as He alone is good and powerful, so He alone is always just towards everyone. Men may wish to be just and aim at being so in every instance. But objectively, owing to the limitations of their nature, they never succeed in being entirely and unexceptionally just. And some there are, even in convents—for human nature has a way of asserting itself everywhere in its weak as well as its strong manifestations—who are wilfully, culpably, and stubbornly unjust towards their fellow beings.

*They Have a Cute Way*

We must not be surprised or shocked, therefore, when we become aware that superiors, too, whether high or low, whether they are in charge of an entire community, a single convent, a lone department of a convent, a class-room, or a hospital ward, remain human and discover divers human fallibilities. Among these is the inclination to have and play favorites or pets among their subjects. They are drawn to love them because of their appearance, youth, manner, or some other ingratiating feature, which not seldom is a cute way of dispensing flattery on the part of the beneficiaries.

Loving and favoring them as they do, there is no good trait they do not see in them, and no unfavorable quality they can spy in them. They consider them, regardless of their immaturity and inexperience, capable of riding over ever so many senior and more worthy members of the community, and holding any office and occupying any position with grace, efficiency, and success.

*Pull versus Push*

Forthwith they promote them from one office to another, meanwhile throwing into the discard every respect for the length of faithful service, and the merit of valuable

achievements, and the credit of truly religious conduct of a number of good Sisters who are deserving of prior consideration on every count, and who cannot but feel mistreated and hurt in their sense of justice and equity. They are made to feel quite undeservedly the meaning of the popular adage, that in advancement one ounce of pull prevails over a ton of push.

In convents, in the extreme case described above, this is but rarely the case, no doubt. But the victims in the case never expected it would ever happen in the convent and their disappointment is the keener as a result. And what irritates the wound in their heart is the observation that the superiors in question pride themselves the while, in the face of their violent and intolerable partisanship and pet worship, on their invulnerable sense of justice, unwavering fairness, and unimpeachable equity. They never have the least suspicion of their blatant want of fairness and their entire lack of distributive justice.

*Favoritism and Antipathy*

Even as some superiors in their unjust favoritism — a weakness, by the way, which very few superiors successfully ward off altogether because of its inveigling and elusive connection with hidden self-love —

elevate their so-called creatures in defiance of the claims of distributive justice, so they not rarely have a corresponding antipathy for one or more members of their community which hinders them from meting out proper justice to the subjects concerned.

For some reason or other, or for no reason they can give themselves a concrete account of, they have conceived a conscious or unconscious dislike for a Sister. In consequence of their subjective dislike of her the poor Sister is and always will be all wrong in their eyes; and whatever she says, does, or omits to say or do: everything is antecedently and altogether wrong. Hence she has no chance to be fairly and equitably considered in the way of honorable advancement and recognition in the community.

*Predestined to Inferiority*

As far as the superior is concerned, the unfortunate Sister is predestined and foreordained to an inferior and humiliating position for life. And often there is nothing she can do about it save to be resigned and patient as will be elucidated later on. She realizes that by her tactics the superior is ruining her morally; for the very fact that for so long a time she does not rise in the order according to her rank of seniority and

undoubted ability is making even her best friends among the Sisters lose faith in her and suspect her in some way or other. The superiors in question would do well if they gave this angle of the unsavory case more consideration.

*Cheap Rhetoric*

She would not be human if she did not smart under such unfair treatment. And here again her wound is aggravated by her consciousness that the superior in treating her as she does is fully satisfied that she is a paragon of justice and a model of fairmindedness. That this case is by no means merely fictitious or a play at cheap rhetoric is evidenced by the fact that not a few subjects who had absolutely no prospect of ever amounting to anything in the eyes of the community under an unsympathetic superior, no sooner the superior was supplanted by another they at once rose to positions of considerable dignity and responsibility, and fully justified the trust placed in them.

*Cardinal Newman*

A historic example of how much room God allows to human nature in the apportionment of ecclesiastical promotions—and the same holds good regarding promotions in

a religious order—we have in the elevation of Dr. Henry Newman to the cardinalate. He was seventy-eight years old before he was created a cardinal. In the pontificate of Pope Pius IX, whose counsellors were convinced by what they considered obvious and impregnable reasons that the bestowal of the cardinal's dignity upon the learned and saintly convert would be more of a detriment than an advantage to the Church at large, Newman had absolutely no prospects of receiving the high recognition for his work in the interest of the true faith.

*The Immortal Apologia*

But as soon as Pope Leo XIII ascended the throne of St. Peter friends of Newman got the pontiff's ear and without much difficulty prevailed upon him to grant the great distinction to the famous writer. Practically the entire Catholic world applauded the choice of Leo. Yet Newman was not more worthy of the grand dignity when he was seventy-nine than he was at the age of, let us say, sixty-four, or immediately after he wrote his immortal Apologia. It may be that they who opposed his elevation under Pius did so from subjective motives that were not impugnable; again one or the other may have been under the influence of secret and

deceptive envy or jealousy when he did what he could to obstruct or, at least, when he entirely refrained from furthering, as we are supposing he should have done, the elevation of the deserving convert. God alone is the competent judge in these matters, for he searches the heart and the reins.

*The Reverse Side*

After having considered, with reference to the Sister who is a hapless victim of ambition, the failings and shortcomings of superiors, we shall now do well in also looking at the other side of the picture, or in reviewing the faults and liabilities of the Sister herself. After balancing both sides we shall be in a position to make some worthwhile reflections on the matter in general.

Superiors are often very uncharitably and unjustly accused of playing favorites and having their pets in jeopardy of distributive justice. It is true they esteem a number of their subjects more than others. They place greater confidence in their ability and all round trustworthiness. They have a high regard for their virtue and religious spirit and their influence towards the edification and general wellbeing of the community. For this reason they love them and favor them in preference to others who in their eyes do not

possess the same qualities and inspire the same confidence and invite the same love. They can as little be blamed for this as our Lord can be blamed for loving and preferring Peter, Andrew, and John to some of the other apostles.

*Wise Psychology*

Everyone likes to have as his collaborators such as are not only able but also loyal, devoted, and congenial. They are easier to work with and surer to obtain results by. Hence it is but natural that a superior should be guided in the choice of her most trusted helpers by the natural laws of honorable and wise psychology, and select the Sisters of the aforesaid stamp rather than others whom she considers less capable, less reliable, and less agreeable to work with.

Whatever Sister complains of this practice does not understand or want to understand the fundamental motives of human activity; and there is not the least doubt, if she herself were up and others down, she would follow identically the same method if she intended to have any kind of a successful and satisfying administration. It may not be your fault if to the superior you appear clumsy, ungainly, uncongenial, and undesirable as one of her executives. But it may

not be her fault either. And you can blame her as little for feeling no appeal from you to her, and acting accordingly, as she can blame you for not exerting an appeal upon her. You are evidently not intended for one another in the way of close cooperation in the field of government. The sooner you realize this, and the more graciously you resign yourself to it, the better you will fare and the happier you will be.

*The Ups and Downs of a Pet*

After all, there are two sides to being a favorite or a pet, in the good as well as in the obnoxious sense. Favorites frequently fall faster and harder than they rise. The falling, even when it is gradual, is usually more bitter than the rising was sweet. And in their very ascendancy and zenith of glory favorites, in religious communities as well as elsewhere, pay dearly for whatever honor, prestige, and power they are enjoying.

We are living in the days when men and women go out to make and smash records in all lines of endeavor, sometimes the silliest and most puerile. I remember one such feat where a man in Chicago sat at the top of a high pole far above a very tall building to establish a record of endurance in this

ridiculous undertaking. His sitting far up in the air, all alone, day and night, exposed to the elements without shelter, while the people below looked up at him for a while: some of them wonderingly and admiringly, others coldly and sneeringly: and then nicely and comfortably went about their business or pleasure completely safe against the inclemencies of the weather, recalled to me in a way, and speaking with due reverence, the unenviable position of many superiors in various spheres of life.

*Dignity Involves Isolation*

Granting that they are high in dignity, and that people ever and anon look up to them with wonderment and admiration, theirs is usually a position of much aloofness from the easy, familiar, and chummy converse with others which every normal human being craves and enjoys. It also exposes them to many hostile influences in the shape of close observation and sharp criticism of their individual conduct and public acts. Often they wish they could be themselves, to use the expression of the day, and conduct themselves with freedom from the ceremonious restraint and dignified formality their position usually imposes upon them in some degree or other.

No one likes to be always conscious that every one of his words may be quoted in his disfavor; every one of his gestures suspected; and every one of his acts subjected to the closest scrutiny. Yet this is the usual condition of a superior. Meanwhile the subjects go or can go about their business, their work, and recreation unconcerned and unmolested.

*Pals and Chums*

Some time ago I heard a newly-elected Father Provincial, not of our order, ask earnestly: "Tell me, if you can, why is it that all my confreres in the order who, as far as I was aware, were my pals and chums before I was elected Provincial, now shun me and give me a wide berth, although I have just been elected?" This conduct of his subjects hurt and peeved the good man of God. He wanted the Religious under him to consider him the same good fellow of yore and approach him with the same fraternal simplicity and companionship. But this is hardly possible. Two may be the best and closest friends in the world: as soon as one gets to be the superior of the other their mutual attitude can hardly remain the same. Either one or the other changes, or both change, or they both suspect one another of having changed. Whatever the case may be, aloof-

ness and isolation are usually the tax a superior has to pay for the honor implied in his elevation.

*A Glass of Wine*

When the saintly Pius X was reigning, an American monsignor residing in Rome, whose office frequently brought him in contact with the Holy Father, enjoyed a degree of filial familiarity with His Holiness. He related that one day, while he was having an easy audience with the Pope, one of the chamberlains announced that the hour had arrived for a designated interview with a distinguished visitor. The monsignor hastened to leave when the Pontiff bade him stay a while longer. To his surprise the Pope, who was visibly tired and exhausted, poured out for himself a glass of wine and drank it, saying: "I can afford to do this while you are here. When the higher company comes I must be on my dignity." The monsignor was not a little edified at this naturalness and guilelessness of the holy Pontiff. At the same time he became more than ever aware of what an ordeal and burden the highest office on earth must often be to the incumbent. Every superiorship relatively imposes similar restrictions and sacrifices upon its functionary.

*Cute and Clever*

Some subjects there are, however, who, far from keeping aloof from their superiors, seem to have a peculiar knack of getting and staying as close to them as possible. While some doubtless do this for sheer reverence and sympathy for their superiors and therefore deserve every credit there are others whose motives are not beyond suspicion. They may be cute and clever in their way. But they are hardly ever dexterous enough to disguise their selfish, aspiring, and intriguing nature in their officious and obsequious, if not servile and adulatory, conduct towards those in power. They not seldom attain their end in spite of their apparent fawning and cringing, and rise at the expense of the superior's credit for fair play before the community. She is simply taken in by their artful and crafty ways of self-seeking ambition.

*Go-Getters*

In their doggedness and impertinence these subjects are hard to hold down. They are go-getters, to use a slang but expressive phrase, in an irresistible manner. They do not rest. They scruple at nothing. They stoop to everything. They suffer any humilia-

tion, and swallow the bitterest pills of refusal until they get what they are after. Naturally the reaction in the more timid and also more deserving Religious, over whom the brazen and scheming ones run rough-shod to gain their ambitious goal, is by no means pleasant and exhilarating. But this condition exists in some form or other wherever human nature is sufficiently represented. And, what is worse, it has a tendency to create factions among the members which are anything but a blessing to the community.

*A Sublime Maxim*

Years ago within my hearing a young priest was complaining to another that he was left so long in a lonely and altogether uninteresting country place. He was wishing his bishop would give him a position in which there would be more room and stimulation for the exertion of his talents. The other priest told him if he wanted a change he would have to let the bishop know of it somehow. To this the first one rejoined that in the seminary they were told to follow the maxim of St. Francis de Sales who advised everyone neither to desire nor to decline a promotion, but to accept whatever his superior tendered him of his own accord.

*A Pragmatical Maxim*

The second priest then retorted, saying, that if this maxim were universally followed, one could adopt and practice it with a prospect of fairness and success. But since there are so many even in the Church who, in aspiring after better and higher places, rather follow the principle: "God helps those who help themselves," the one who lets God act alone in the dispensation of promotions is likely not to do so well as those who expect God to help them while they help themselves all they can, in season and out of season, by fair means and by others that are not so fair.

This mode of reasoning, which I am merely reporting without adjudging its soundness and propriety or, relatively, its unsoundness and impropriety, seemed to weaken the first priest in his high ascetical principles which he had imbibed in the seminary, and he showed a certain willingness to help himself to an advancement if God would thus help him sooner.

*Rivalry In Virtue*

Speaking of the gentle and gracious St. Francis de Sales, we are reminded of his discussion of the rivalry in virtue that he desired his nuns, the Sisters of the Visitation,

to practice. He put up the case of two Sisters, an elder and a younger one, engaged in this virtuous competition. They were walking together in the corridor towards the same room.

As they got to the door the senior Sister, to practice humility, yielded precedence of entrance to the younger nun. Not without reluctance the younger nun accepted the precedence in this instance. But why should she let the elder nun practice humility at the expense of her own humility? The saint replies that while the senior Sister is thus practicing humility, the junior Sister is practicing charity by acquiescing in the pleasure of her senior companion.

*Sham Contests*

The saint's point, as usual, is clear and winning. He has not in mind the sham humility contests of Religious who hold up a procession or delay a meal because one wants another to occupy a more honorable place than herself, although she herself is really entitled to it. At times these contests are edifying; again, they are not infrequently irritating because of their evident insincerity.

But Sisters have ever so many other less obtrusive and more fruitful and edifying

ways of practicing substantial humility by ceding precedence in honor, dignity, power, success, and popularity to their rivals gracefully and wholeheartedly.

*A Question About Laughter*

Although it does not pertain to this subject, the insertion of another saying of dear St. Francis de Sales, which I read in the same book as the foregoing, may not be unwelcome to the readers. I am reporting from memory. The nuns asked their spiritual father if it was ever allowed for them to laugh outside of the precincts and time of recreation?

To this the saint replied that in the choir laughter was always out of order. In the refectory, however, if something ludicrous occurred, and twelve Sisters—likely about half of the community—laughed, it would not be wrong to join them in their laughter.

*They Smack of Simplicity*

In our day such questions smack of a great deal of simplicity in our eyes. They would hardly occur as worth while and deserving of attention to many Sisters. The reason probably is that nowadays, victimized by the spirit of the times, we do not pursue the religious and spiritual life with as much

earnestness, concentration, and attention to detail as was the case in the century of St. Francis.

*It Created a Stir*

There was a time when, for example, the discussion on the nature of the pure love of God created the greatest stir not only among bishops and theologians, but also among the various Religious of both sexes, especially among the nuns. Who can imagine such a dispute throwing us in a frenzy of controversy today?

Of course, we should not want the recurrence of the heated and rather scandalous discussion to take place among us. But the impossibility of it shows that today our minds are engaged with other subjects, and our hearts are engrossed with different matters.

*Every Age Has Its Problems*

At that the Religious of today are doubtless serving God and pursuing sanctity through the solution of the problems that the present age thrusts upon them, and all in all they are meeting the Lord's expectations about as well as their predecessors did and as their successors will meet them.

Here the words of St. Peter come to mind with their respective application to our subject: "In very deed I perceive that God is not a respecter of persons. But in every nation"—and in every age—"he that feareth Him and worketh justice is acceptable to Him" (Acts, 10, 34, 35). But now we must revert to the theme of our chapter.

*Fatherly Advice*

When the famous Fénelon was chosen as the tutor of the dauphin, which meant he was to be promoted to the episcopacy, his spiritual director, Father Tronson, gave him some very fatherly and candid advice. Among other things he told him that he could hardly find much comfort in the thought that he had not aspired or any way sought after the honor that was thrust upon him. Hardly anyone, he said, is elevated to a higher position without having directly or indirectly worked towards it. He may not have expressly angled for it, but he was at pains to make a good impression in general on those who were in a position to procure something for him and, consequently, when something desirable came his way, he could hardly say the acquisition of it had never in any way at all been the object of his thoughts and desires.

*He Forgot to Pray*

There seems to be a deep and acute psychological insight revealed in this remark. It reminds me of a certain Religious who was quite advanced in years before he was ever made superior. Telling his experience, he said very naively: "Every day for years and years I prayed to the Holy Ghost that He would not make me a superior. One day I chanced to forget it, and I became superior in——." But his tenure of office was short-lived. Soon he was dispossessed of his dignity because he could not meet its exigencies to the satisfaction of either his subjects or the higher superiors. But the question is whether his forgetting to pray to the Holy Ghost on that particular day was not intentional or semi-intentional.

*A Martyr Complex*

Subjects who are always complaining that they are being ignored or slighted in favor of others who are the superiors' pets not seldom suffer from a martyr complex joined to a superiority complex. They do not see themselves as others see them. They exaggerate their good qualities and underrate their shortcomings. Potent as are their limitations they are not and never want to be conscious of them. However inexperienced,

clumsy, and maladroit they are, they feel equal to any charge and capable of holding with credit any office in the community. Their very sureness of being supremely capable is a presumption against their capability. True worth is associated with modesty and humility. In convents, too, fools are always willing to venture where angels fear to tread.

*He Loved Himself*

A zealous seminarist, who used his vacations to earn money for his school expenses, was working for the Illinois Central Railroad in summer in a minor capacity, checking up on cars in the yards, etc. One day a rather aged laborer, whose business it was to pick up stray paper and other rubbish along the tracks, began to complain to him about the way he was being treated by the company, animadverting that the high-salaried officials were younger men and were upstarts in the business when they were compared to him in length of service for the firm. Then he added threateningly: "If they do not take care, one of the these days I will throw up my job, and the Illinois Central will lie flat on its back." He was convinced he was the main prop of the railroad. We must all be very careful and quite humble not to admit

and nurse a similar ingredient in our spiritual makeup regarding the life and permanency of our religious community.

*Seven Dollars and a Half*

It would help many of us towards substantial religious virtue and contentment if we would have a self-appraisal like the one of the Indian in the story. A commercial traveler got into a conversation with a venerable looking Indian in a western pueblo. He asked the Indian what he did for a living. The Indian replied: "Me preacher." He then asked the Indian what salary he was getting. The Indian answered: "Seven dollars and a half."

The salesman queried: "Seven dollars and a half a day?" The answer was: "No." "Seven dollars and a half a week?" "No." "Seven dollars and a half a month?" "No." "Seven dollars and a half a year?" To this the Indian rather complacently replied: "Yes." The commercial man expressed his view that that seemed to be very poor pay. To this the Indian made answer: "Me poor preacher."

*A Poor Specimen of a Religious*

Whenever we feel we are poorly dealt with either by God or by our order, we

could, if we were humble and sincere enough, derive substantial solace from the candid reflection: "I am a poor specimen of a Religious. I hardly deserve to be treated as well and considerately as I am actually being treated." Our Lord asks us to express this sentiment even when we "shall have done all these things that are commanded." We should declare: "We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which we ought to do" (Luke, 17, 10): hence we are not deserving of any special credit. Much less do we deserve particular distinction when we know but too well that we are very, very far from having "done that which we ought to do."

*She Takes the Sting Away*

It rather edified and pleased me lately when a Religious who felt he was harshly, coldly, and ungratefully dealt with by his community, said: "Well, whatever they have inflicted and are inflicting upon me, I know I do not deserve for anything I have done of which they have cognizance. But for things I have done of which they know nothing I deserve all the punishment that has come and is coming my way, and more." Every Religious, no doubt, could well say the same regarding her condition. By ad-

mitting it, if only to herself, humbly and sorrowfully, she will take the main sting out of the humiliation she is a victim of, really or in her imagination.

### *"He Shall Not Be Known"*

There are others who have a degree of cleverness and are endowed with no inconsiderable parts. But their unfortunate disposition mars what chances for promotion they might otherwise have. They often display a spirit of haughty independence, contrariness, and rebelliousness against those in authority, and succeed in rendering themselves thoroughly and definitely disagreeable and obnoxious to those who have the power to elevate them or to hinder their elevation. The issue is that they are left undisturbed in their sullen fretfulness according to the words of St. Paul: "If any man know not"—if he shows no deference and consideration for those in power—"he shall not be known" (1 Cor., 14, 18).

### *In Statu Quo*

The best way to keep one's poise of mind and peace of heart in all the vicissitudes of earthly promotions, demotions, or no motion at all—which means one always remains in statu quo—is to yield to the refreshing

influences of the Holy Spirit. This teaches one to be glad to be accounted as nobody by men and reckoned as nothing; to seek, in accordance with our Lord's counsel, the lower place in preference to the higher; to prefer to serve rather than be served; to shun rather than invite the bows and courtesies of men; to aim to be last now in genuine humility in order to have prospects of being first there where rank really counts and lasts forever; to learn, also in regard to honors and power, to say truthfully with the great imitator of Jesus: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, to be content therewith. I know both how to be brought low, and I know how to abound (everywhere and in all things I am instructed): both to be full and to be hungry: both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things in Him Who strengtheneth me" (Philipp, 4, 11-13).

*Unrestrained Ambition*

A gruesome example of inordinate and unrestrained ambition is given us by the Bible in the person of Aman, the shortlived favorite of King Assuerus. The king "advanced Aman. . . And he set his throne above all the princes that were with him. And all the king's servants, that were at the doors of the palace, bent their knees, and worshipped

Aman: for so the emperor had commanded them. Only Mardochai did not bend his knee, nor worship him. . . Now when Aman had heard this, and had proved by experience that Mardochai did not bend his knee to him, nor worship him, he was exceedingly angry. And he counted it nothing to lay his hands upon Mardochai alone. . . He chose rather to destroy all the nation of the Jews that were in the kingdom of Assuerus" (Esther, 3, 1 *sqq.*).

*An Insatiable Passion*

How insatiable the passion of ambition can become is demonstrated by the fact that, in spite of all the high honors which were shown him on all sides, Aman was unbearably miserable because a single foreigner refused to curtsy to him. And to what terrible deeds it can lead its unscrupulous and helpless victim is illustrated by Aman's inhuman decision to kill an entire people merely to avenge the slight of a refused curtsy. In convents, thanks be to God, so monstrous an exhibition of passionate ambition is out of question. Yet there, too, the weakness of human nature crops out in much fainter, yet very unwholesome and unpleasant manifestations of unholy ambition.

If in this chapter on refreshment in heat, or the moderation of inordinate passions, I have singled out ambition as the solitary example, it was not because ambition is the only passion Religious are prone too. But it may be the one that causes more noticeable havoc, chagrin, displeasure, and discontentment in convents than any other single passion. Furthermore, it is more likely than any other immoderate passion to disguise itself as a commendable virtue to its possessor, and to blind her to its baneful influence upon herself and others.

*The Last Weakness*

St. Augustine says that vanity is the last weakness of great men. It is the one that blinds them longest for cajoling them most. Ambition is closely allied to vanity. One is the love of power; the other is the love of greatness and preeminence. Hence we must not be surprised that even saints, the greatest of men, often find it hard to divest themselves entirely of these the most blinding and tenacious of human weaknesses. In convents we not seldom find very ascetical natures who with all their piety retain a pronounced hankering after power, dignity and honor to the end of their lives.

Not to mention any of the many other passions to which the human heart is prone even in convents, and for which nuns continually require the refreshment of the Holy Spirit, I shall conclude this chapter with the touching story related of herself by St. Monica to her son, St. Augustine, who in his turn published it to the world in his Confessions.

When Monica was a young girl she was in the keeping of a faithful servant who had loyally ministered to the family for many years. This servant took particular pains to impress upon Monica the abstinence from wine as a safeguard of her virtue.

*She Learned to Like Wine*

As Monica grew somewhat older, however, her mother, trusting her fully, sent her into the cellar to fetch wine from the barrel. On one such occasion the young lady, not from a love of wine but from mere girlish petulance, sipped from the cup she had filled a little wine, since to drink much went against her. At her next errand into the cellar she indulged in her prank again, taking a somewhat large draught. Soon she got to like the wine and drank an entire cup at each visit to the cellar.

One day she happened to get into an altercation with the servant who, to hurt her mistress poignantly, chid her for being a wine-bibber. This charge cut Monica so keenly that, overwhelmed with shame, she then and there resolved never to touch another drop of wine as long as she lived. No doubt she kept her resolution.

This story contains many salutary lessons and cautions. It teaches us that passions begin with slight indulgences which, if they are not checked betimes, easily and quickly grow into gross liberties and tyrannous license. We learn from it, too, that the only way to stop the furtive and elusive inroads of passion is to dismiss it once for all by a resolute and inflexible will regardless of the complaints or pleadings of our inferior nature.

*Saints and Passions*

We also infer from this story that saints are not immune from the attacks of unruly passion; but that they really become saints through keeping their passions in check and mastering them with unrelenting constancy and heroism.

Nuns, in our country especially, are in little danger of falling victims to the thirst for wine. Yet they may not be altogether

beyond the range of similar dangers lurking in the use of medicines that contain more drugs than is wholesome for their system. But even this case is so rare that it requires no further attention.

What matters is that in this retreat, whatever passion may have got control of us, we shall be so overcome and subdued by the voice of our remorseful conscience, that we will resolve without further ado, after the example of St. Monica, to cast off its fatal dominion definitely and forever. "In heat Thou art refreshment."

# LECTURE X.

## Solace in Weeping

### PART ONE

*"They were all filled with the Holy Ghost"* (Acts, 2, 4).

The name Paraclete, which our Lord applied to the Holy Spirit, means comforter and consoler. One of the prime functions of the Holy Ghost in the soul which He visits is to soothe it in affliction, brace it in trouble, and cheer it in discouragement. In view of all the trials, persecutions, and hardships ahead of them the apostles indeed needed the fullness of Him of Whom the Church sings in the sequence: "In fletu solatium," "In weeping Thou art solace." And there is no Sister earnestly striving after perfection and holiness who does not feel the same need and desire to be filled with Him Who is the divine advocate, friend, and helper of her soul in every vicissitude of religious life, and Who will be sweet solace to her in her weeping.

*Do Nuns Weep?*

Do nuns weep? They would not be human if they did not. God intended this earth to be a vale of tears for every denizen of it from

the beginning to the end of his or her earthly sojourn. The child is hardly born when it begins to whimper and cry. And those that wait upon a dying person wipe away the tears from his eyes until they break in death. Jesus Himself cried more than once. He cried so much that he shook or convulsed with sorrow. We must not be surprised, therefore, that nuns weep.

Women weep easier and more than men because of their more delicate sensibilities due to their more responsive nervous complexion. And if a nun is, as a famous ecclesiastic used to remark, twice a woman, we must not be surprised if some nuns weep easily, much, and often. Ordinarily they weep in private, unseen and unsympathized with. Sometimes they cannot control their tears and they weep in public before several or all the Sisters; and there are occasions on which they literally follow the example of our Savior who from sheer sadness "groaned in the spirit and troubled Himself, and . . . wept" (John, 11, 33, 35).

*Why Do Sisters Weep?*

Why do Sisters weep? From various causes, natural and supernatural. Some of the causes for which Sisters weep deserve their tears; others do not. The tears they shed,

according to the sources of them, are either of great or little merit, or of no merit at all, or of actual demerit. The Holy Ghost, if He is given a free hand by the nun in retreat, will stop the last named category of tears and sweeten the first. In weeping He is solace. Speaking humanly, this is His favorite distinction, to live up to which in every instance He is both eager and jealous. He delights in nothing more than in the revival and exhilaration of a soul in distress that puts her trust in Him and calls on Him for help with child-like confidence.

*Homesickness*

There are Sisters who cry from a feeling of homesickness. When they left their dear ones at home they made the sacrifice cheerfully for the Lord; but when they made it they had no idea it would involve so great an ache and wrench of the heart as they by and by experience. Homesickness is a significant word. Its sound is true to the nature of it. It is in reality a sickness which affects the heart and mind, disturbing, disorganizing, and disqualifying its victims for the time being to such a degree that they become morbid and onesided or, rather lopsided, in vision and affection, losing their normal per-

spective, poise, and balance to their utter discomfiture and undoing.

They see things in an exaggerated and distorted way, and imagine much without any objective foundation, in the present or regarding the future: everything tending the while to make them regret bitterly they ever left their happy home, and inclining them to muster sufficient reasons to justify, and enough will-power to decide on, their return to their beloved ones in the world.

*It's a Disease*

Blessed are the nuns who, when they are in the grip of this mental and emotional distemper, remember that it is a disease from which they are suffering, and have sense enough not to commit themselves to any premature and ill-advised step while they are suffering from it. They rise above it in the superior part of their mind, from which, so to speak, they look upon their malady from a point of vantage, observing its eccentric pranks with a sort of painful amusement, and decided to keep their heart in possession in the midst of all the sorrow it experiences, and to exercise control over their affections against the heaviest demands to surrender it.

If they act thus, with the grace of the Holy Spirit and His abiding consolation, it

will usually not be long when their sickness will abate, their normal thought and emotional life will return, they will rejoice over the signal victory they have won over themselves with the consciousness that the struggle will hardly ever again be thrust upon them with the same degree of virulence or, if it should be, that their first victory is an earnest of all the subsequent ones that may be necessary.

*A Natural and Normal Occurrence*

That a nun who has left a good home and dear relatives or friends should be a victim of homesickness is a very natural and normal occurrence. Some Sisters are attacked by the infirmity at an early stage, as postulants or novices. Others experience it later; some quite long after their departure from the world. Very few remain altogether immune. The attacks differ considerably in violence, depending upon the temperaments and characters of the persons involved. In one case the attack is brief; in another it is protracted. Some Sisters by a heroic and decisive victory quash forever the tendency to homesickness. Others continue to be bothered with it intermittently practically through their entire life. Certain tense and tragic situations of the

nun's family and home may also render her siege of homesickness more stringent.

*Seasick*

I recall meeting a sailor on board a transoceanic liner who had been doing work at sea for thirty years or more, but who invariably got sea-sick on every trip he made on the boat. This is known to be an exception, however. Tried sailors may get sick in a severe storm, but not otherwise. Similarly there are Sisters who never really get entirely over their inclination to homesickness. They are the exception, however. Most nuns, after vanquishing one or two attacks, are never troubled with it again save perhaps in severe storms or trials when they may be approached by the furtive thought that, if they were at home among their own, this or that plight would not have overtaken them, and by a subconscious desire to be there in reality. But this is not homesickness in the ordinary sense of the word.

*They Have No Nerves*

There are Sisters who, like some women in the world, seem to have no nerves in their makeup. There is no sentiment or anything like soft and gentle affection noticeable in

them. They have never felt homesick themselves, and cannot understand how and why others should ever be homesick. They are especially out of sympathy with those Sisters who grow visibly sad and cry for homesickness. They call them babies, and declare they should be ashamed of themselves for their childish demonstrations, and that they do not belong in the convent which is the home of stout, valiant, and robust souls who can rise above nature and ignore the unworthy clamors and weak propensities of flesh and blood.

*Hard Task-Masters*

These Sisters, for want of normal human sympathies, are as a rule not the most pleasant companions to live with. And as superiors they are inclined to be hard task-masters and veritable tyrants in certain instances and to given subjects. Our Lord, on His part, never lent any authority to so unsympathetic and heartless an attitude. He appreciated the fact that Mary and Joseph were homesick "for Him and sought Him sorrowing"; for immediately "He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was subject to them" (Luke, 2, 51). He was also grateful for Mary Magdalen's "homesickness" for Him. When she sought Him weep-

ing on the morning of His resurrection He rewarded her by lovingly calling her: "Mary!" (John, 20, 16.) And no one ever showed more human sympathy for his friends than Jesus showed as He wept at the grave of Lazarus, so much so that the Jews said: "Behold how He loved him" (John, 11, 36).

*She Wants to Cry*

At any rate, when a Sister is truly homesick she is prone to cry. At times she cries fitfully and sobs hysterically for pain. She longs to go back to her dear ones, and her morbid imagination makes her be convinced that she will never be able to feel a moment's happiness and contentment again unless she returns to them. Even as the person who is sea-sick is indifferent to life and death, so the homesick person does not care to live if she cannot go back to her home and to those whom she left behind. For a while she does what she can to keep her feelings of sadness in reasonable bounds and to hide them from others and stifle them altogether. But soon they get the better of her and overcome her so that tears, warm and copious tears, are for her her only relief. But while they relieve her, they seem at the same time to aggravate her affliction by making her appear more of a martyr and an object of pity in her own eyes.

*Her Eyes Were Opened*

Some Sisters, who had a very acute case of homesickness, with the consent and advice of the superiors have sought a remedy for their unbearable distress of heart in leaving the convent temporarily and returning to their homes until their emotions would settle down again to normalcy. When they got home they realized the hallucinations and folly their malady had made them victims of. Each one, with rare exceptions, found that things were not at all as her diseased mind had pictured them. Her people did not miss her as much as she thought; they were getting on rather well without her; they were glad she was in the convent and the keeping of the Lord; and they could not disguise their disappointment in seeing her come back so soon and for so flimsy a reason.

*They Are Ashamed of Her*

They would have welcomed her back gladly had she changed her mind about her vocation for some solid and substantial reason, which they could tell their friends without a blush or shame: but they were humiliated that for mere passing sentiment and sickly emotionalism she gave up in a moment of weakness what she had deliberated on so maturely and for the acquisition

of which she had made the greatest sacrifices of her life, and by embracing which she had won the admiration, envy, applause, and felicitations of her worthwhile and well-meaning relatives, friends, and acquaintances.

Nor do they conceal their embarrassment and humiliation at her disgraceful conduct. They feel they ought to recall all the beautiful things they formerly thought and said of her, and apologize for the grand and glorious career they bespoke for her in the preferred service of the King of kings. They cannot view her in any other light than that of a heroine fallen of a sudden from her pedestal; and of a meteor that flashed resplendently in the firmament of holiness for a brief moment merely to drop unseen and unsung into the darkness and oblivion of mediocrity.

*She Comes to Her Senses*

She, on her part, becomes aware that for her home will no longer be the same. The attitude of her loved ones will necessarily be different than before. She will at least imagine that they have changed in their appraisal of and their sentiments towards her. This will make her feel ill at ease and out of place and in the way of everybody. To continue in such a situation is anything but pleasant. Hence, in more cases than one, she very

wisely makes up her mind to return to the convent the sooner the better, to persevere in it to the end, for better and for worse, in health and in sickness, until death parts her from it.

If she does, she usually finds it sweeter and more homelike and agreeable than at her first entrance and, like the Prodigal Son, although she was not guilty of any of his sins, she never again, now that she has been welcomed back to her heavenly Father's house, feels the least inclination to think of leaving it, even in thought or fancy. She says after the manner of St. Peter from the very depth of her heart: "Lord, it is good for me to be here. I will make my tabernacle here forever" (*vid.* Matt., 17, 4).

*A Dangerous Remedy*

While this procedure has proved and still proves to be effective in isolated cases, there is ordinarily a jeopardy to the religious vocation of the Sister in question attendant upon the application of it. The better, wiser, safer, and more virtuous method is to conquer homesickness, whatever its initial or progressive violence and persistence may be, by having recourse to the Holy Ghost, the divine solace in weeping. He will assure the homesick nun first of all that her case is by no

means solitary or unique. He will repeat to her the words He inspired St. Peter to write to the first Christians: "Dearly beloved, think not strange the burning heat which is to try you: as if some new thing happened to you" (1 Peter, 4, 12). Practically every Sister of her and other communities before her suffered the same affliction and overcame it to their profit and happiness. Sisters there were who suffered immensely more than she, and whose fancy pictured to them in the most frightful colors the continuous horrors they would suffer if they stayed in the convent away from their dear ones: who yet vanquished the disease with the help of the Spirit of Jesus and never ceased congratulating themselves on their conquest and rejoicing heartily over it as long as they lived. If they could conquer, why cannot she do the same?

*They Become Saints*

Neither is it of rare occurrence that the very Sisters who are most subject to intense homesickness because of their affectionate and amorous dispositions and strong attachments, when they gain control over these emotions or passions, and lead them towards and concentrate them on God and His service, become the most virtuous and saintly

nuns. This is accounted for partly by their native temperament, but more by the generous grace of God which was given them, first, to overcome their excessive leanings towards their kin and friends, and, second, as a reward for the sacrifice they made for the love of God. In generosity God never suffers Himself to be even distantly approached, let alone equaled or outdone, by His creatures; and least of all by His consecrated brides. Moreover, Sisters who have passed through a violent siege of homesickness themselves are likely to be very sympathetic and kind towards others who are similarly afflicted.

*The Whispering Solace*

The Holy Ghost, in solacing the homesick Sister in her lonely weeping, will whisper lovingly to her that the very acuteness of her pain brings in beautiful relief the greatness of her sacrifice for Jesus. When she heeded His gracious invitation which He tendered her, saying: "Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear: and forget thy people and thy father's house. And the King shall greatly desire thy beauty; for He is the Lord thy God, and Him they shall adore" (Ps. 44, 11, 12), she justly felt that she was rendering a grand and magnanimous service

to the Lord; and she rendered it, as she then thought, with all her heart and soul, without qualification or reserve.

*Her One and Only Love*

Now, then, when the greatness and heroism of the sacrifice really and actually become apparent to her in consequence of the unmitigated longing she feels for her beloved ones at home, from whom she parted for Jesus' sake, is she going to retract her sacrifice, and forfeit every claim to heroism, and renounce every aspiration to be a martyr of love for her divine Spouse as she had pretended to yearn with all her heart to be? Maybe never again in her life will she have so wonderful and favorable an opportunity as she now has in her dreadful plight of homesickness to demonstrate definitely and practically, beyond doubt and question, to Jesus as well as to herself, that Jesus is her one and only love, now and forever, and altogether sufficient unto her in every way.

If she passes this occasion up, and gives in to her morbid emotional weakness at the expense of her attachment and consecration to Jesus, there is reason to fear that she may never again recover herself adequately to rise from her inferiority in virtue and sanctity.

Contrariwise, the decisive conquest of her homesickness for sheer love of her Savior may be for her the start of a rapid and ceaseless flight unto high religious perfection and most enviable holiness.

*Pike's Peak*

While I was riding in a train from Denver, Colorado, to Chicago, Illinois, several years ago, eye witnesses told me the story of a young married couple that traveled from Illinois to Pike's Peak, Colorado, on their honeymoon trip. They had planned to spend two weeks there. They had hardly arrived at the Peak, however, when the young bride was seized by a sudden and violent attack of homesickness. It was her first experience of the kind. She collapsed under it completely. She cried and sobbed like a child. She said she had to go home to her mother without delay. She could not suffer to be away from her any longer.

Colorado, the scenery of which had lured her so strongly before, now had nothing inviting or charming for her. It seemed so lonesome, bleak, and cold a place. It repelled her and urged her to go back to Illinois as quick as the train could carry her. Her husband, who was a sober and sensible young man, naturally felt hurt and injured by her

implicit protestation that he meant practically nothing to her and could not allay, by any attention or love he could show her, her pain of heart for being separated from her dear mother, without whose presence and company life was simply intolerable to her.

*One Honeymoon Trip*

He remonstrated with her, saying, that if she would but man herself to a little patience and common sense in the matter her homesickness would soon be moderated and gradually die away. They would have but one honeymoon trip in their entire life, he added, and consequently they should make the most of it. Besides, since they were not rich, it would be a pity to have spent so much money to come to and see beautiful Colorado without reaping any benefit from it. Moreover, by returning from their trip so soon they would cause wonderment and suspicion among their friends and acquaintances at home and become the laughing stock of the town for years to come.

*A Spoiled Child*

But all his pleading and haranguing, whether he did it in tender and winning, or in stern and threatening tones, was in vain. As a spoiled and pouting child the young

woman was impervious to reason and virtue, and blind to her own and her husband's interests. She insisted on taking the next train home, and cried and whimpered until her husband, who had no mind to continue or to aggravate the embarrassing scene, very reluctantly acquiesced in the senseless, arbitrary, prejudicial, and stubborn demand of his wife of a day. Four hours after they had arrived at the goal of their honeymoon trip they boarded the train that carried them back to Illinois.

The spectators of this childish and silly prank of the wilful and selfish bride had absolutely no sympathy for her. Neither did they conceive a high regard for the training of character she had received from her mother. But without exception they felt keenly for the disappointed and abused husband. They were satisfied that the prospects of living with a woman, who was the victim of such maudlin sentimentality, until death would part them, were by no means such as to inspire hopefulness and optimism. They were convinced, too, that after that one incident of undue self-assertiveness on the part of the wife the sweetness and joy of the couple's first love were shattered never to return in their pristine vigor again.

*A Reflection Upon Her Lover*

It will not be at all difficult to apply the moral of this incident to the case of a nun who is in the clutches of vehement homesickness and who, instead of turning to her divine Spouse for her heart's comfort, cheer, and joy finds Him and His love altogether unsatisfactory and negligible, and has no rest until she goes back to her kin and friends in the world. It is a sharp and humiliating reflection upon her heavenly Spouse, or rather it discloses how little He really means to her, if soon after her espousals to Him she prefers to be actuated by her attachment to her relatives of blood rather than be swayed by the sweet power of her love for her mystical Bridegroom. Once she sacrifices Him for the sake of her sentimental leanings to her people or friends in the world, the relations between Him and her will hardly ever be the same again as long as she lives. Besides being at least an indirect insult to Jesus, in Whose house and presence she cannot feel at home and make herself even tolerably contented, her weak and childish conduct throws credit neither upon her own character nor upon the home in which it was trained, or ill-trained, or poorly trained.

*They Could Not Stand It*

This subject recalls an odd episode that occurred in a convent of my knowledge. Three young men had entered the novitiate ostensibly to become lay-brothers. After three weeks they demanded an interview with the provincial superior in which they protested that they could not stand it another day in the convent. They had to leave at once. The Father Provincial remonstrated with them saying they had not given themselves a fair chance to find out what cloistral life really was. Three weeks were too brief a period in which to form a mature decision regarding their vocation. They should at least test themselves for about three months in the life of the convent before resolving to quit it forever.

*"No Love in the Convent"*

But they insisted it would be futile for them to try to continue cloistral life any longer, since it was simply impossible for them to endure it another day. He then asked what it was that made the life so absolutely intolerable for them. He was and had been leading the same life for forty years without finding it at all unbearable. Then one of the three blurted out: "Father, there is no love in the convent." This was a mere

alibi, to use a common phrase. They chafed under the general restrictions of conventual life and wanted their liberty and independence back again. If they found no love in the convent it was due to their bringing, inviting, and rendering none.

The homesick nun, without expressing it so bluntly, usually makes herself believe, too, in her morbid state of mind, that there is no love in the convent: at least none that would satisfy her and take the place of her mother's love. There is plenty of love in the convent for her if she is but ready to woo, accept, and enjoy it. It is the love of Jesus, her chosen Spouse, the grandest, sweetest, most delicious and ravishing love there is. Of this she can have all she wants, provided she renders herself worthy of it; and it will not fail to satisfy her completely and permanently. It is, indeed, a painful reflection upon the loyalty of Jesus to His brides when a Sister feels she has to leave His home and return to her parents because "there is no love in the convent".

### *Her Parents Are Loyal*

In assuaging the poignant grief of a homesick nun, the Spirit of God sweetly and gently reminds her that she is not the only one in pain over her separation from her dear

ones at home. They, especially her parents, may be feeling her absence more keenly than she is feeling theirs. But they have deep faith in God, and an abiding love for Jesus, and the greater their grief of loneliness is the more willing they are to bear it for the glory of God and the sake of their Savior. Theirs is true virtue and genuine religiousness. They would rather expire under the smarting pain than withdraw the sacrifice they made when they gave their consent to the holocaust their daughter intended making of herself and them unto God when she entered religion.

They cannot and will not tolerate in their case the thought of being Indian givers so-called, by regretting and recalling the gift of her to God as soon as it begins to hurt and grieve them. Even as Pilate said to the Jews with reference to Jesus: "What I have written, I have written" (John, 19, 22), so they say in regard to their sacrifice of their child to God: "What I have given, I have given." When they, old and infirm as they are, or on the verge of becoming so, can be so noble, brave, and magnanimous towards God, are you going to be so craven, cowardly, and pusillanimous as to cancel your donation of yourself to God as soon as it begins to tax and irk you?

*Others Are Homesick*

The Holy Ghost furthermore submits to the homesick nun the vision of countless girls in the world who for economic or other reasons must live apart from their parents with less prospects of seeing them again than she has of seeing hers again; and they are often tormented by indescribable fits of homesickness: yet they bear and overcome them all merely to succeed in the world and make a career for themselves. If they can do as much for an earthly reward which is often insecure and always shortlived, why can she not prevail over her homesickness for a sure and safe hundredfold reward here on earth and an everlasting reward in heaven, both of which are promised her by Jesus, Whose words will not pass away even when heaven and earth shall pass away?

*Jesus Was Homesick*

But far and away the most potent means which the Holy Ghost employs in being solace in weeping to a homesick nun is the picture of Jesus, her loving Spouse, in the act of suffering the most severe assault of homesickness ever suffered by anyone on earth, and immensely greater than all the homesickness ever suffered by all human beings together. This took place in the Garden of

Gethsemane when Jesus, conscious of the ordeal of his final separation in His mortal life from His dear Mother and beloved disciples, which was impending, went into the most painful agony in which "His sweat became as drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground" (Luke, 22, 44). The pain was so overwhelming that Jesus prayed: "Father, if Thou wilt, remove this chalice from Me: but yet not My will, but Thine be done" (*ib.*, 42).

When the Father insisted that He drink it, Jesus drank the chalice readily for the love of every stricken soul; hence also of the homesick nun. The angel that God sent Him definitely sweetened the potion for Him. After Jesus suffered such untold homesickness for you are you not glad that you have the opportunity of enduring a like suffering for the love of Him? And the same Holy Ghost Who, being God, sent the comforting angel to Jesus will send you the same angel of comfort in your heart's grief: in fact He Himself will be your Paraclete, sent by Jesus to you to be your solace in weeping: *in fletu solatium.*

# LECTURE XI.

## Solace in Weeping

### PART TWO

*"They were all filled with the Holy Ghost"* (Acts, 2, 4).

The tears a Sister sheds for homesickness, provided they are not excessive, are not sinful, or unworthy, or dishonorable tears. Again, being shed from a merely human motive, they are not of themselves meritorious tears. If she is sensible, therefore, she will not shed more of them than she must. She will wisely economize her tears and use them as much as possible for the highest and most gainful spiritual purposes.

*Jesus' Advice on Tears*

On His doleful way to Calvary, shortly before He died, our Blessed Savior gave His view on the value and purpose of tears to the pious women who were bewailing His hard and sad fate. He did not tell the women to stop shedding tears; but He exhorted them to shed them for a better purpose, saying: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over Me; but weep for yourselves and for your children" (Luke, 23, 28).

He even dissuaded them from weeping through sympathy for Him, sublime and worthy as was this consecration of their tears: and desired them to use their precious tears as tokens of true contrition wherewith they might appease the anger of God and avert His punishment from themselves and their children. How much more will Jesus charge a Sister who is shedding tears for homesickness to change the purpose of her tears and turn them to a much better account by devoting them to the expression of her sorrow for sin and of her abiding love of her divine Spouse!

*She Weeps Over Them*

She will also very much improve the value of her tears if she sheds them from compassion for unrepentant sinners who are unaware of their great spiritual danger; or for the poor pagans who are immersed in the darkness of idol worship; or for misguided heretics and infidels who are groping about aimlessly and hopelessly in search of something that will ease the violent native urge that impels them towards the quest of "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John, 14, 6). By doing this a Sister will but imitate Jesus, her divine Model, in His conduct regarding Jerusalem. "When He

drew near, seeing the city, He wept over it, saying: If thou hadst but known, and that in this thy day, the things that are for thy peace: but now they are hidden from thy eyes . . . Thou hast not known the time of thy visitation" (Luke, 19, 41, 44).

*The Power of a Tear*

A single tear, issuing from the right spring of the heart, can extinguish the fires of hell for a soul consigned to them through mortal sin, and open heaven to it with all its glory. Similarly one such tear can increase voluminously the celestial merit and splendor of a soul that is already in grace. With this correct appraisal of the possible value of tears in the spiritual domain we shall now pursue our consideration started in the previous chapter, and ask: For what other reasons besides homesickness do Sisters cry? And in what way is the Holy Spirit solace in weeping to each individual nun?

*No Success*

Some Sisters cry because of their real or imaginary lack of success in their peculiar line of work. They do not get on so well as they would like and expected. They are a disappointment to themselves and, as they suspect, at least, also to the other Sisters and

to non-members of the community, among whom there may be those whose opinion they evaluate highly. Other Sisters in the same work get so much commendation from all quarters while they never receive a compliment or a word of encouragement from anyone. All they get is slurs of blame, expressions of dissatisfaction, and innuendoes of incompetency from superiors, equals, and subjects. Much as they try, things seem to be getting worse instead of better. Their companions are being preferred and promoted in view of their ability and success, whereas they are being let down from a more to a less responsible position from year to year, and the end is not yet in sight.

*They Want to Oust Her*

Maybe it is a superior who, no matter how much she endeavors to render them happy and contented, is looked awry at and snubbed by her subjects, some or all of them. They conspire to ostracize her by ignoring her and refusing to be in any way civil to her. They are set on her removal without giving her any terms. They leave nothing undone to undermine her prestige and to render her further tenure of office impossible. If she knew where she was wrong or deficient she would gladly

apply the correctives: but they will not as much as deign to tell her, for they simply want her demoted.

Or it may be a subject who for the world cannot please or satisfy her superior by anything she does. The superior does not want to be pleased or satisfied with her. She is determined she is and always will be very much displeased with everything said Sister does.

*They Do Not Like the Cook*

Or it may be a nun teacher who is always found fault with by the pastor or the parents of the children; or a Sister nurse with whose performance the doctors and patients find everything wrong; or a Sister cook whose meals, the selection as well as the preparation of them, find favor with none of the Sisters.

In every case the one who is frowned on may inculpably be the cause of all the uncomplimentary things that are thought, said, or done against her; or perhaps she is but the victim of ill-will, envy, jealousy, or partisanship. She may not know if it is the one or the other in her case: or both. Anyway, the thought of so much and such continuous and varied failure quite overwhelms, depresses, and saddens her until she is forced to seek

relief in tears. She sheds them freely and copiously, and by their nature these tears are bitter, indeed.

*Her Tears Are Sweetened*

The Holy Ghost sweetens these tears by reminding the Sister in question that her tears because of ill-success, whatever shape it may take in her or others' eyes, in or outside of the community, whether they occupy conspicuous or inconspicuous positions, are a part of God's design in effecting her salvation and elevating her position in heaven, for "they that sow in tears shall reap in joy. Going they went and wept, casting their seeds. But coming, they shall come with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves" (Ps. 125, 5-7). He tells the Sister what Jesus told His disciples: "Amen, amen, I say to you, that you shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice: and you shall be made sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy" (John, 16, 20).

*Jesus Wept*

Our Lord, as an example to us, shed the same kind of tears. Because He did not succeed in converting the inhabitants of the holy city, and in averting the terrible catas-

trophe with which it was threatened, "when He drew near, seeing the city, He wept over it" (Luke, 19, 41). Also in the Garden of Olives "He began to grow sorrowful and to be sad" (Matt., 26,37). The drops of blood that oozed from His brow were due in part to His feeling of depression because of His failure to save the people from which His human nature had originated and which until then had been the chosen people of God. After the angel of God comforted Him, however, He recovered from His low-spiritedness, saying: "My Father, . . . not as I will but as Thou wilt" (*ib.*, 39).

*She Turns Failure Into Success*

The Sister who learns to bear her real or apparent failure in this manner will reap more reward from it than she could have reaped from the consciousness of the greatest and most flattering success. After all, it is not the success that counts with God, but the good will and the sincere and well-meant attempt to carry out His desires according to our capacity. Success does not depend on us but on God. St. Paul expresses this nicely when he says regarding his and others' preaching: "I have planted, Apollo watered: but God gave the increase. Therefore, neither

he that planteth is any thing, nor he that watereth: but God that giveth the increase" (1 Cor., 3, 6-7).

*St. Paul Had the "Blues"*

St. Paul himself had his moments of what in the slang phrase of the day are called the blues. He says, for example: "We would not have you ignorant, brethren, of our tribulation which came to us in Asia: that we were pressed out of measure above our strength, so that we were weary even of life" (2 Cor., 1, 8). At the same time he gives us the best reason for this attack of sadness and the wholesome fruit we should derive from it, adding: "But we had in ourselves the answer of death: that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God Who raiseth the dead; Who hath delivered and doth deliver us out of so great dangers: in Whom we trust that He will yet deliver us" (*ib.*, 9, 10).

God, then, allows you to be overcome by your consciousness of actual or fancied failure so that you learn to distrust yourself and to put all your trust in Him; and, even more, that you work merely to please Him and not to gratify yourself or others by the successful issue of your work. By inordinately indulging their complacency over what they

consider their success in convent, hospital, school, or other work some Sisters get or take their reward in this world at the expense of the reward they might have had in eternity. Hence it is safer to feel humble and even sad regarding the issue of one's work, so the sadness does not become immoderate; for then there is more prospect of hoarding one's reward in the everlasting realm of God.

*Jesus Blesses Her Efforts*

In contrasting her weakness, impotency, and insufficiency with what is expected of her or with what she would like to do, many a nun is like the boy that had "five barley loaves and two fishes", regarding which St. Andrew said: "What are these among so many?" (John, 6, 9.) Yet, through the blessing of Jesus the little supply amply sufficed to feed the vast multitude of people and to leave a considerable surplus of fragments to boot. Thus the seemingly mediocre and inadequate talents and gifts of many a good nun, whose help is in the Name of the Lord, often produce wonderful results for God's glory and the welfare of souls in a noticeable or hidden manner. The Lord's arm is not shortened.

*He Wanted to Leave*

The little chapel on the Appian road near Rome, called "Quo Vadis?" is a reminder of St. Peter's sadness over his failure to convert the Romans. After many seemingly futile trials to draw them to Jesus Christ in faith and love the first Vicar of Christ lost heart. He regretted that he ever came to Rome where he was convinced he was spending his time and energy uselessly. He decided to leave it for better, more promising, and more responsive fields. Our Lord, in a vision or apparition, as the legend relates, stopped him, however, and bade him to return whither He, no doubt, had directed him to go in the first place. Peter returned to Rome. Little as he may have been aware of it, he planted the seeds of faith in the Eternal City that grew into the tree which now covers all the world.

*A Show Place of the Globe*

And the tomb of St. Peter, whose ignominious death, as his persecutors judged, was a fitting climax to his egregious life's failure, is today, and likely will be to the end of the world, one of the outstanding show-places of the globe. After our Lord's tomb, and that of our Lady, no other is so glorious and inspiring. It is a very emphatic illustration

of our Lord's words, which will come true in your case also, if you render yourself worthy of it by your humility, patience, and conformity to God's will in all your failures and disappointments, viz.: "Many that are first shall be last: and the last shall be first" (Matt., 19, 30). "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt., 5, 5).

*Targets of Jealousy*

There are Sisters, too, who are very able, clever, and successful in everything they undertake: and still they cry. They are the victims of persecution in or outside of their community. They are slandered and maligned. Their reputation is seriously impugned by gross and devilish charges. As a result everyone begins to doubt them or to hold them in suspicion. Once they were happy in the peaceful possession of a good name and spotless repute. But as soon as success came their way the venomous tongues of envy and jealousy began to single them out for their target and deprive them unjustly of one of the dearest possessions they had.

*It Cuts Into Her Heart*

When this is perpetrated by outsiders or non-members of the community, it is disagreeable enough. Yet, when in her afflic-

tion the community stands by the calumniated or otherwise maltreated nun, she can bear it without much difficulty. But when the persecution she suffers is inflicted upon her by her fellow Sisters, and especially such as pretended to be and who, she fully believed, were her best friends and her trusted confidantes, and had therefore been the recipients of her closest and most sacred secrets, its edge becomes immensely sharper and cuts deeper into her heart with its cruel and ruthless blade, calling forth a veritable flood of the most bitter tears.

The weakness of human nature, which by no means becomes extinct through the assumption of a religious garb, sees to it that this deplorable persecution never entirely dies out in convents. As long as envy and jealousy assert themselves in the human heart, and succeed in disguising themselves in the form of an angel of light, some of the foremost Religious will be wittingly or unwittingly caught in their snares and made the blind dupes of their vicious and devastating frenzy.

*Shady Machinations*

This psychological phenomenon accounts for by far the greater part of the persecution Religious experience on the part of the mem-

bers of their own community. It explains many shady machinations against good and honorable superiors whose prestige one or the other subject is bent on destroying at any cost. Even as Cato of old used to say after every speech he made in the Roman senate, that he was of the opinion that Carthage, the rival of Rome, had to be destroyed, so these evil-minded subjects seem to have no other thought and desire for the time being than the removal and complete undoing of the superior of whose dignity and success they are insanely jealous.

*Dishonorable Tactics*

The same dishonorable tactics are at times employed by nuns against their fellow Sisters who are not but ought to be superiors because of their unquestioned ability and undoubted merit. They are not allowed to rise to positions of trust and honor for sheer jealousy, more or less disguised. Not seldom superiors themselves are guilty of this disgraceful conduct towards such of their subjects whose talents they cannot help recognizing, and whose deserving accomplishments for the community they must admit, and whose qualifications for leadership they cannot doubt, but whose rise they fear as a menace to their own prestige and power as superiors.

Hence they hold them down by fair means and foul as long as they can without any regard to justice and equity and with an eye only to their own safety and permanency in office. They give them no chance to exploit their gifts and demonstrate their ability. They try to break their spirit by ignoring them while they heap preferments and promotions upon much inferior and less deserving members.

That by this unfair and uncharitable procedure they indirectly harm, if they do not ruin, the good name of their hapless victims, by making it appear, and the entire community believe, that there must be some serious charge against them justifying their non-promotion—and there will always be many other jealous persons only too ready to draw the unwarranted inference, believe it, spread it, and magnify it—causes them no scruple or misgiving whatever.

*God's Verdict*

They single out one or several slight blemishes of character of their victim which they exaggerate, discolor, and distort until they seem sufficiently big enough to them and to others to whom they communicate them to justify their inequitable conduct in their and others' eyes. Meanwhile they keep

on looking upon themselves as models of the religious spirit, and as paragons in the administration of justice. In their blind self-vindication and self-complacency they say within themselves like the Pharisee of old that they thank God that they are not like the Publican whom they are holding in undeserved subjection. The verdict of God, however, will also be the same in regard to their case as it was in reference to the two men in the gospel.

*Saints Experienced It*

If the history of the saints did not supply us with numerous examples of the persecutions of Religious on the order of those we have been considering, and others of a similar nature, we might doubt whether they really ever occur in convents today. But you can hardly read the life of a saintly Religious in the past who was not, at some period of her convent life, subjected to some brand of persecution by the members of her own order. In convents, too, have been verified our Lord's words: "A man's enemies shall be they of his own household" (Matt., 10, 36). And as human nature has not changed a particle since their day, it would be simplicity bordering on folly to expect that nowadays such persecutions are a thing of the past, and will never be likely to be resuscitated again.

*The Truest Test of Love*

Even if this were so, much as we should have reason to congratulate ourselves on it on the one hand for being relieved of a source of so much worry and trouble in the cloister, on the other hand we should have to deplore the fact of thereby forfeiting one of the greatest sources of real merit, and one of the finest and truest tests of the love we have for God in our hearts, and one of the best means to accomplish resemblance between Jesus and ourselves, which is or ought to be our one ambition in life. The Holy Ghost brings these advantages home to the soul that is suffering from this kind of persecution and thus sweetens her bitter tears and is to her heavenly solace in weeping. He keeps on whispering to her, in her natural and quite justifiable craving for justice in her own behalf: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill. . . Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt., 5, 6, 10).

*A Superior's Comfort*

The unjustly persecuted superior who is threatened with the loss of her position by the vile plots of false and perfidious subjects will remember and derive comfort from

the doleful declaration of Jesus at the Last Supper: "Behold: the hand of him that betrayeth Me is with Me on the table" (Luke, 22, 21). It was one of the most acute and bitter sufferings of the passion of Jesus that He was betrayed by one of His own. St. Paul, the great disciple of our Lord, was to experience a similar pain. He tells of "the perils from false brethren" (2 Cor., 11, 26), which he had to endure, and again "of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privately to spy our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into servitude" (Gal., 2, 4).

*He Died in Exile*

St. Gregory VII, one of the greatest popes who has ever lived, said at his death: "Dilexi justitiam et odivi iniquitatem: propterea morior in exilio": "I have loved justice and hated iniquity: therefore I die in exile." There have been and are superiors or ex-superiors in every community who can say the same words with sincerity and truth and, let us hope, as a sweet and soothing balm for their soul.

All the Sisters, similarly persecuted, whether superiors or subjects, will be glad and rejoice that they are thus made like to Christ Who spoke through the prophet of

old, saying: "If my enemy had reviled Me, I would verily have borne with it. And if he that hated Me had spoken great things against Me, I would perhaps have hidden Myself from him. But thou a man of one mind, My guide, and My familiar, who didst take sweet meats together with Me: in the house of God we walked with consent" (Ps. 54, 13-15). And they will heed to their profit the words of the same psalm: "Cast thy care upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee: He shall not suffer the just to waver forever. . . I will trust in Thee, O Lord" (*ib.*, *23*, *24*).

*Experience Should Be Their Teacher*

At the same time they must learn from the acrimony of their own persecution not to be a partner in any way to the persecution of others. It happens not rarely that the very ones who complain bitterly of having been or being the subjects of unfair persecution on the part of their fellow Sisters, are guilty in their turn of the same kind of persecution against others when the tables are turned and jealousy and envy claim them as their blind and relentless victims. In fact, some are so deluded by self-love that while they are whimpering about being woefully persecuted, they are maltreating others with equal heat

and from the same base and unworthy motives, which they deplore being the target of.

*Greatness Needs Distance*

It is an admitted psychological fact that greatness needs distance of place or time, or of both, to be justly recognized. No man is a hero to his valet. No Sister, however saintly, is generally acknowledged as a saint by those who live with her continually, unless her advanced age or some other infirmity inspires a certain pity and veneration in place of arousing jealousy and envy. Human nature never ceases playing pranks on all of us.

In spite of the comparatively short space she spent in the convent St. Teresa of the Child Jesus made keen observations on cloistral life. One day she remarked to a novice: "The only place not subject to envy is the lowest; it is only in that lowest place that there is neither vanity nor affliction of spirit."

*An Embarrassing Question*

Here may be the place to answer a misgiving that no doubt arises and has frequently arisen in the minds of the readers and hearers of these lectures, as well as of those contained

in the predecessor of this volume, "Uni Una," mention of which is made on the last page of this book. What is the purpose, say some Sisters, and what possible benefit can it have to mention such sinister and discreditable things about nuns in a book that is intended for the open market and can be read promiscuously by anyone who procures it?

Will the reading of such things not disedify and shock not only pious lay people, but even young and inexperienced Sisters, both of whom never suspect that Sisters can be guilty of the things that are mentioned or hinted at in the book? And will its exposure of those convent conditions that should remain hidden from the world as much as possible, since the world is incapable of making due allowance for the human weakness in the consecrated virgins of Christ that is responsible for those deplorable conditions, not give the enemies of the faith and of religious life welcome ammunition for their vile and spiteful attacks on both, and for their cynical contempt, ridicule, and mockery of Sisters in particular? In view of this possibility would it not seem wiser and safer to omit every mention of said adverse occurrences among nuns in a book that is destined for public circulation?

*It Applies to All*

In answer to this I want to recall above all the remark contained in the foreword to this volume to the effect that whatever is said of Sisters in this book or in "Uni Una" is applicable in its way and with due allowance for the difference of sex to men Religious, to seminarists, and to priests as well; and also, of course, to pious lay people of both sexes. But since the book addresses itself to Sisters in particular, they are singled out for special mention.

In the second place, the observation is in order that, if the above misgiving were valid, it would militate very strongly against the Bible of the Old and New Testament. If the principle on which the misgiving is based were to be followed in fact, we should today not know of the betrayal of Judas, nor of the denial of St. Peter, nor of the incredulity of St. Thomas, nor of the flight and cowardice of all the apostles in the passion of our Lord.

*They Were Afraid*

Some of the first Christians, bishops as well as the faithful, actually eliminated certain accounts from their copies of the gospel as being liable to misunderstanding by the weak, and likely to lessen the honor due to our dear Lord. Thus, for instance, some

suppressed the story of our Lord forgiving the adulteress, and the report of the bloody sweat of Jesus in the Garden. Others no doubt often wished and agitated for the suppression of the history of the conversion of Mary Magdalen, of the adulteress, and of the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob, not to mention a number of passages of the Old Testament which they found highly disedifying and objectionable.

But what would the gospel mean to us, if all these consoling episodes were eliminated, if everything that was human were suppressed, and the life of Jesus were told us in a one-sidedly idealistic, and therefore unappealing, and unattractive manner? God took care, therefore, that the official record of His Son's earthly and human life should not be transmitted to posterity in so narrow and unmeaning a way; hence He inspired the sacred writers to report our Lord's sojourn on earth just as they did, and assisted the Church in keeping this report unaltered and unadulterated and, using the word with all reverence, unexpurgated throughout the centuries. And we are intensely thankful for it.

### *He Came Five Hundred Miles*

Many years ago a very ascetical friar began his retreat to his brethren, saying in all

earnestness: "My dear confreres: If you are under the impression that I am come five hundred miles to pay you compliments or offer you flattery, you are very much mistaken." He soon enlightened them plainly enough on the real purpose for which he had come. Every retreat-master who knows his business is aware that his main work in the interest of the retreatants is not the delivery of compliments and the offering of incense of adulation to them—although sensible encouragement is a very valuable feature of every effective retreat—but his chief aim must be to call attention to their faults; to open their eyes to their shortcomings; to apprise them of their failures; to chide them for their sins: and then to point out to them the way of sensible correction, of the judicious repairs of their spiritual losses, and to assure them of God's ready pardon and His unfailing help for their betterment and perseverance.

*The Annual Audit*

The retreat-master is the special physician of the soul called in for consultation, as it were, and as a help to the ordinary spiritual director. The physician's part is to diagnose the various diseases of the patients and to tell them the result of his findings without

palliation and circumlocution. The retreat-master is summoned as the extraordinary spiritual accountant, or bank examiner, to help the Sisters make a candid, precise, and correct annual audit of their spiritual books. The more objective he is in his examination, and the more plain and unvarnished he is in his exposure of mistakes, deficits, liabilities, and dangers of impending bankruptcy, the more benefited will the Sisters be by his cooperation.

The retreat-master is the special advocate or lawyer called to assist in preparing the Sisters for the great and final cross examination they will be submitted to by our Lord at death. The more definite and concrete he is in drawing the Sisters' attention to the points that are likely to count most in this cross examination and in equipping them spiritually to cover them nicely and to the complete satisfaction of the Judge, the more appreciative and grateful they ought to be. And since this book as well as its predecessor purports to be a collection of retreat lectures it cannot but proceed in the same manner in order to achieve the good it aims at.

*Warts and All*

It is a well-known utterance of Oliver Cromwell, who said to the artist that was

about to paint his portrait: "Paint me: warts and all." The religious life has nothing to lose, neither on the part of its members, prospective members, or others, by being faithfully, yet discreetly and sympathetically painted, "warts and all."

*The Heroic Lives of Our Nuns*

Some disedification will no doubt be caused by the reading of this book, even as a degree of disedification is caused—pardon the presumption of the comparison—through the reading of the Bible. But the fear of this disedification hardly obligates one to desist from publishing a book which is likely, as is fondly hoped, and the history of "Uni Una" seems to prove, to provide immeasurably more edification than cause disedification. Well-meaning and sensible people are not scandalized in being told that Sisters, even though they wear a sacred garb and live in God's own home, are thoroughly human, and that nothing that is human is consequently foreign to them. They are rather edified the more by the heroic and almost superhuman lives of the great majority of our nuns after ascertaining, through the recital of actual occurrences in cloisters, how very human Sisters are.

*Quixotic Ideas Are Dangerous*

As to the fear lest girls, who are or may be prospective candidates for the convent, be discouraged and deterred from entering the cloister because of the disclosures contained in this and the previous book, there seems to be no sufficient ground to entertain it. Postulants, as a rule, fare well in the convent if, before they entered, they had clear and sober conceptions of convent life, as it actually is, viz., thoroughly and characteristically human. Whereas, if their ideas of religious life, before they embrace it, are fairy, utopian, and extravagantly idealistic, they are likely to be soon and rudely disappointed, disillusioned and shocked. Quixotic ideas of a vocation are the poorest preparation for its pursuit.

Here again we can use the illustration of a human marriage. The girl who contracts it with nothing but expectations of high romance, sweet dreams, and delightful ecstasies of unalloyed, unruffled, and unceasing love, is making a bid for a very raw awakening from her fatuous reverie and a number of terrific heartaches: while the girl who enters upon marriage with sensible and sober ideas and expectations of it as it actually is in real life is much better prepared to meet its stern obligations and bear its heavy

burdens as well as to taste its virtuous pleasures and enjoy its honorable delights. The same is true regarding the candidates for the convent.

*They Feel Sorry for the Superiors*

Some object, however, to the references made to superiors in books of this kind. If not in themselves disrespectful and derogatory, they say, such critical and fault-finding remarks with reference to the superiors, their personalities and administration, have a tendency to lower the dignity of superiors, and to diminish the reverence due to them and their enactments on the part of their subjects. They may even have the ulterior regrettable effect of instilling such a fear and dread of the office of superior in the Sisters, that none of them will be willing to assume so arduous and thorny a position.

Here, again, one may with all respect invoke the authority of the Bible. Our Lord's severe censuring of the bishops of Asia Minor, as recorded in the Apocalypse, is not at all in accordance with the spirit and logic of this objection. Neither is His charge "to the multitude and to His disciples, saying: The scribes and the Pharisees have sitten on the chair of Moses. All things therefore whatsoever they shall say to you, observe

and do: but according to their works do ye not. For they say and do not" (Matt., 23, 1-3).

It has been said not without reason that superiors more than subjects are directly or indirectly responsible for whatever relaxations and deteriorations infest religious orders. On the other hand, the regular observance of religious life and cloistral discipline and the flourishing condition of convents in a spiritual and material way are to be credited, as a rule, more to the superiors than the subjects.

Superiors are as human as the subjects. Being human they are liable to human frailties and irregularities. In fact, the preeminence and power of the superiorship is likely more than not to increase the self-assertiveness of human nature, and to show how very human they can be and really are.

### *He Shows His True Self*

It is said that a man, and the same doubtless is true of woman, is likely to betray his real self somehow when he eats, when he is sick, when he gets old, and when he acquires riches or power. There is an element of truth in this saying, especially as regards the last clause of it. Those among us who have had occasion to observe Religious who

rose to dignity and power will register more than one surprise they got because of the striking and plain character revelation, for better or for worse, which they remarked in the persons concerned.

Superiors, as all other Religious, make retreat for their self-correction and self-improvement. For this reason they like to be told wherein they fail, and how much and in what way they can amend their ways. They feel because of their very station they need retreat more than their subjects, not only because of their greater responsibilities and, perhaps, more numerous temptations owing to their very condition as superiors, but also because so much depends on their personal life and example for the maintenance of discipline and the religious spirit in general among the Sisters. They know the truth of the age-old Latin proverb: "Qualis rex, talis grex": "As the leader, so the followers."

*Sisters Would Distrust It*

Moreover, the Sisters at large would have little confidence in and pay no attention to a book that pretended to delineate religious life for their instruction and edification, but which, while it dwelled much on the faults of the subjects and their transgressions

against superiors, said never a word in criticism of the shortcomings of superiors and their excesses against their subjects.

Furthermore, sensible superiors want and welcome wholesome and reasonable criticism judiciously given by a retreat-master. One of the deplorable handicaps of their position usually is that they are not told the truth, in a candid and unbiased manner, regarding themselves and their administration. There are those who openly flatter and cajole them; and those who tear them to shreds behind their back; and even those who make furious charges against them to their face: but what superiors desire is an objective, dispassionate, impersonal, well-meant, and constructive criticism of themselves and their official conduct. This they hail as a godsend for their spiritual advancement and holiness.

*Hard On Superiors*

If in this connection a personal reference will not be amiss, I want to say that I was not a little amused by a remark made to me by a Religious priest of another order two years ago. From reading my "Uni Una" he said he got the conviction that I had never been a superior—neither had he, for that matter—; for if I had been, I could not have written regarding superiors and their office

in the way I did. A nun superior in the South told me, too, that I am rather hard on superiors. This may be her view of it. No doubt there are subjects aplenty who feel I have not been hard enough on superiors; and in their turn some superiors think I might have been more stringent with the subjects.

A superior, advanced in years, wrote to me to compliment me on my book "Uni Una". Among other things she said that the way I describe young Sisters in my book their young Sisters are in reality. Had a young Sister written the letter, she no doubt could have made the same remark regarding the old Sisters.

*Criticizing the President*

Superiors at times discover the faults and mistakes of subjects more clearly than the subjects themselves discover them. Vice-versa, subjects often discern the fallibilities and errors of superiors better than the superiors themselves. No one is a fit judge in his own case. If only those who have been Presidents of the United States were in a fit condition to criticize the President, he would receive but little, if any, criticism, to the detriment of himself and the country.

Even as the grass on the neighbor's lawn looks greener than your own, which means

that his position has a way of looking easier and more desirable than yours, so, too, contrariwise, the faults of another are likely to strike you more and look more ugly than your own. There is an advantage, at times, to see ourselves as others see us. To be made aware of our faults by others, no matter what our station may be, is apt to help us towards a becoming and very serviceable humility and a virtuous and sensible self-depreciation.

*A Missionary's Embarrassment*

The story may not be directly to the point. Yet it bears indirectly on the subject under discussion. It was told me by a pastor of a large parish in one of the middle states. A missionary, at the opening of a mission, fervently exhorted the people of the congregation to attend the mission services, not only in the evening, but also in the morning. The first mission Mass was to be at 5:30 in the morning, and the missionary expected a large crowd of working people at that Mass.

He went into considerable details in his exhortation regarding this matter. He advised the parishioners to have an alarm clock to wake them in good time; to see to it that the clock was in good running order;

that it had the correct time; that it was wound up; that the alarm was justly set, properly wound, and duly released.

The following morning there was a good crowd for the early mission Mass, but, alas, the missionary himself was not on hand to say the Mass as he had been designated to do. Unfortunately, he himself had overslept.

After about a quarter of an hour he was summoned and said the Mass. He was visibly embarrassed and explained to the parish that they had to excuse him since for once his own alarm clock failed him. He made the mistake of reiterating this apology almost throughout the entire week. He would have done better had he said nothing relative to the unpleasant incident. Anyway, his experience made him more humble and more tolerant of the misfortune of others who chanced to oversleep and come late to the morning service. The realization of one's own weakness has a tendency, so one has virtue and common sense, to render one more considerate of and forbearing towards others.

*The Fire Department Came*

Because of its resemblance to the previous story I may be permitted to relate the following one also. When I was a guest in a rectory of a very large parish in one of our

vast American cities a long time ago, the rector on Saturday night assigned to every priest the hour at which he was to celebrate Holy Mass the next morning. "Because one of the ushers is away on his vacation," the rector said, "I shall take the six o'clock Mass, so I can function as a sort of an usher at the subsequent Masses."

The following morning the rector haplessly overslept. The parishioners who were waiting for the six o'clock Mass grew impatient. They sent someone to the rectory to inquire why there was no Holy Mass. The door bell of the rectory was out of commission, but the one who tried to ring it did not become aware of this untoward circumstance.

As there was no response at all to his pressure on the button at the door, he conceived the fear that all the inmates of the house were asphyxiated. He then called the fire department for help. It came at once. There was a great commotion, of course. But before the fire department had a chance to get in its work the rector was awakened. Realizing the situation he was thrown into shame and confusion, of course. He asked one of the assistants to say Mass at once. He decided to say Mass later when he would be more composed in his mind. But it is time we return to our subject.

*The Superior Had a Cold*

How egotistic and overweening a person can unconsciously become through being and having a long time been superior was brought home to me recently. One of our Fathers, as a guest deputed to say Holy Mass in a Sisters' private chapel for about twenty nuns, was told by the Sister Sacristan that there was to be exposition of the Most Blessed Sacrament before and during the Mass. He was prepared to officiate at it when the Sister hurriedly came to tell him that there was to be no exposition, since Sister Superior had a cold. Her cold must have somehow subsided during the Mass, for after Mass the Father was told there was to be benediction with the Most Holy Sacrament. No doubt, if the actual facts of this incident had been known, it would have appeared entirely rational. Yet, as it was recorded, it smacked of an egotism of which one does not need to be in religion long, or anywhere else, for that matter, to become a witness.

*Roles Change Hands*

In religious orders superiors as well as subjects do well to remember at all times the words of the Bible: "Remember my judgment: for thine also shall be so. Yesterday

for me, and today for thee" (Ecclus., 38, 23). The superiors of today will be the subjects of tomorrow; and the subjects of today will be the superiors of tomorrow. What, therefore, is said in a general way with reference to the present incumbents of posts of responsibility should be taken to heart also by those who are predestinated to occupy ere long the positions the former will be asked to vacate, or from which they will voluntarily resign.

At all events I sincerely hope that whatever I have said, or say now, or will say in the future in my books regarding Sisters, whether superiors or subjects, will ultimately redound only to their edification, comfort, encouragement, and improvement, and will help them achieve their heart's desire of getting closer and dearer to their heavenly Spouse from day to day, by shedding what displeases, and by acquiring what delights Him.

### *St. Teresa Was Consoled*

In her deep humility St. Teresa of Spain used to say, that she herself derived much more consolation and stimulation from the perusal of the lives of those saints who had at one time been great sinners like herself but later became great saints. Their experi-

ence and example made her hope that in spite of her many sins and failings she might become a saint, too, some day. Similarly young Sisters and other pious persons in the world or away from it will rather be quite consoled and stimulated towards acquiring sanctity when they learn that consecrated women of God, in spite of having striven after perfection for years and years, are still more or less subject to the ordinary human infirmities in one or the other phase of life. This knowledge will keep them from becoming discouraged because of their own continuous lapses and relapses.

*St. Paul Blamed His Superior*

St. Paul not only openly reprimanded his superior, St. Peter, but he also made a record of it and passed it on to posterity, saying: "When Cephas was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed" (Gal., 2, 11). Neither St. Peter nor St. Paul have suffered a loss through this publication of a superior's mistake; but many timid and diffident souls have derived solace and comfort from this apostolic episode.

The same is true, in a degree, of the rather heated arguments between St. Augustine and St. Jerome, between Bossuet and Fénelon, and similar human adventures of great

and good men, the narrative of which braces less stout and magnanimous souls in the endurance of their flaws and shortcomings.

*He Gave Advice to the Pope*

The great St. Bernard of Clairvaux did not hesitate to instruct his erstwhile pupil, Pope Eugene III, in the duties of his office in a very outspoken and straightforward way. The Pope was doubtless sincerely appreciative of and heartily grateful for the advice and admonition he received. And the Church reverently prizes the work of the saintly abbot.

I know that in the minds of some of the readers will now bob up the ancient Latin adage: "Quod licet Jovi, non licet bovi;" which we may render into English, with reference to our present subject, saying: "What saints may venture to do sinners may not attempt." Yet, discounting the large difference in the critics, the legitimacy of an enterprise that is sponsored by men eminent for sanctity and learning cannot be disallowed lesser minds, provided they do not transgress the bounds of charity, justice, moderation, and propriety.

*They Lose Heart and Faint*

The reason some Religious are so despondent and crestfallen is because they surmise

that their spiritual reverses are unique and most extraordinary; that they are exceptions in being harassed by temptations that seem foreign to their holy state; that they are the only ones who ever yield to certain disgraceful weaknesses; and that they are solitary in being guilty of this or that humiliating sin. As a result they lose heart and grow discouraged. If they knew that what presses them down and deprives them of all alacrity is quite incidental to unregenerate human nature, and that practically all the Sisters have to combat similar temptations, and be resigned to similar defeats, and own up to similar faults as they, they would not so easily faint in the spirit, but would rather buoy themselves up with a virtuous optimism and trust in God.

*The Truth Keeps Us Humble*

Finally, by putting things as they are, and not merely as we wish they were, or would like to have others believe they were, in our convents, this book promises not only to inspire greater confidence in itself in those who read it, and consequently be more helpful and animating to them: but it will also bring out the point which it is paramount for all God-loving and salvation-hungry souls of whatsoever station or profession always to

bear in mind, namely, the exhortation given us by the Apostle in these words: "Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor., 3, 5), "For see your vocation, brethren, that there are not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble. But the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world and the things that are contemptible, hath God chosen; and things that are not, that He might bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His sight. But of him are you in Christ Jesus, Who of God is made unto us wisdom and justice and sanctification and redemption: that, as it is written: He that glorieth may glory in the Lord" (1 Cor., 1, 26-31).

A retreat is intended to mirror truly the actual life of the retreatants with a view to the timely removal of the blemishes revealed and the acquisition of the goodness that is found to be wanting. A retreat is to be the seasonable rousing of the respective retreatants, relatively of the foolish virgins, from their dangerous spiritual sleep which threatens them with utter disaster. To do this it must expose their condition clearly and unhesitatingly, however charitably and considerately.

Even as it is justly considered one of the strongest and most evident proofs of the divine institution and protection of the Catholic Church that, notwithstanding the many scandals that have occurred and continue to occur in its pale, on the part of its leaders as well as its members, according to the prediction of our Lord, it still goes on its beneficent way through the ages, undiminished in prestige and strength, and dispensing its heavenly blessings with the purity and vigor of its initial establishment: so it may be taken as a voucher of God's foundation and protection of the religious life that, in spite of all the human deficiencies and scandals of its members, superiors as well as subjects, it keeps up its spiritual idealism given it by Jesus Christ, its divine Founder, and from century to century, and in every nation and clime of the world, exhibits countless examples of the highest Christian heroism and the most sublime holiness in the form of the most exalted love of God and the most unselfish consecration to the welfare of mankind. Admiring this marvel, and gratified by its rendition of glory to God, all good Religious, in view of their own personal faults and infirmities, humbly confess after our Lord's direction: "We are unprofitable servants" (Luke, 17, 10). "Not to us, O Lord, not to us: but to Thy Name give glory" (Ps. 113, 1).

# LECTURE XII.

## The Endurance of Persecution

"*They were all filled with the Holy Ghost*" (Acts, 2, 4).

Someone has said that education consists in learning how to endure persecution and loneliness. At any rate, a Religious who has learned how to endure these two things well, with patience, resignation, and cheerful conformity to God's will is not only far advanced in general education, but also on the road of religious perfection.

In the previous chapter we considered some of the forms of persecution that practically befall every Religious, due as they are to human nature itself which is nowhere entirely and always subdued in its unpleasant and undesirable manifestations. These persecutions are often as imaginary as they are real; yea, sometimes even more so. Then, too, because of the isolated and confined life of the cloister, and the nervous condition frequently resulting from it, the personal reactions to the persecutions that really occur are not seldom far in excess of the objective nature of the persecutions in question.

*Big as a Mountain*

In other circumstances, and in a different frame of nerves, the person involved would often pass up as negligible as an ant hill what now looks big as a mountain to her. Still, as our sufferings must be measured by our subjective experience rather than the objective nature of them: whether these persecutions are real or fancied, it is all the same as far as the tax on our virtue is concerned.

Since every saintly Religious of the past has achieved his or her sanctity mostly, or at least for a great part, by gladly suffering the domestic cloistral persecutions, many of which are more or less incidental to community life, owing to the divers and opposite temperaments and characters that play a part in it, we can easily glean from the history of the saints how we must train ourselves to bear these persecutions with sweet equanimity and high spiritual profit.

*A Notorious Vixen*

It is of St. Chrysostom that they tell the story, I believe, that one day he was accosted by one of his spiritual daughters who desired to attain high perfection, and who laid the saint under rather heavy contribution by asking for further advice and additional

counsels of holiness day after day. When he had about exhausted his fund of directions he bade the pious lady to take as her companion into her home a notorious vixen whom no one could get on or put up with, because of her ill-tempered and quarrelsome disposition. The saint felt sure that community life with so disagreeable and contentious a person would constitute an acid test for the spirit of the lady affecting high piety; and if she would stand the test it would promote her quickly to the highest holiness.

By referring to this story I am by no means intimating that any convent harbors characters of the stamp of the aforesaid repellent and impossible woman companion. But since, as was hinted above, there is so much subjectivism in our personal reactions, it happens every now and then that the best and finest Sister in the world affects another nun of disturbed or morbid nerves as sinisterly and intolerably as though she were as offensive as said woman.

*Our Nerves Are Jarred*

Few of us are not somehow affected in so prejudicial a manner in some degree or other by this or that member of our community. This member may be much esteemed, liked, and welcomed by other members, but for

some reason his or her mere appearance, carriage, and speech seem to rub our skin the wrong way and produce a jar in every nerve of our body and every fiber of our heart. Consequently, we have the same occasion as the pious lady in the story to test our virtue and progress in perfection by a virtuous and uncomplaining endurance of a condition it is not in our power to change.

We may bitterly deplore the fact that we have to live with so repulsive a person—and here it is good to bear in mind that by the law of nervous correlativity we are, as a rule, equally repulsive to others as they are to us—and we may wish that the person would not affect us so unfavorably: but these wishes do not alter actual conditions; hence the only resource is virtuous patience and forbearance. Here, again, the Holy Ghost offers Himself to be "solace in weeping" by sweetening with His benign grace situations that to unassisted human nature are simply or nearly unendurable, and by making us gradually fall in love and grow very much attached to conditions that at first seemed definitely unbearable.

*The Echo Is True*

The correlativity mentioned above has been nicely illustrated by the echo which

always returns exactly what it receives. The conduct of others towards us in general is an echo of our conduct towards them. Their reaction to us reverberates our reaction to them. Keeping this psychological phenomenon in mind will help us preserve our composure and the saving sense of humor in our daily cloistral converse.

In the life of St. Francis Borgia we read that when he was the Minister General of the Jesuit Order he was traveling in Spain with a companion who was one of the Fathers of the order, and who was afflicted with a throat or lung trouble that made him expectorate copiously. Being overtaken by night on one of their tours from city to city they put up in an inn where one room was assigned to both together.

*He Had to Expectorate*

During the night the sick Father had to expectorate often, as usual. In the dark he thought he was spitting into the corner, away from where his superior lay asleep; but in the morning, as the day broke, he noticed to his keen chagrin and embarrassment that all the night through he had been spitting into the face of his beloved Father, the Minister General. He at once apologized

humbly and profusely. The saint, however, told him he need not worry about what he had done, for after all his face was the most proper place in the whole room to be treated in the manner it was. It deserved nothing better.

The moral of this story is not hard to deduce. In convents the identical expectoration after the manner related in the episode does not occur, of course. But in a metaphorical way many a Sister, with or without grounds, feels that she is being treated after the fashion of St. Francis. She is as much as being spit upon in the sense that she is looked upon as nobody and treated as though she amounted to nothing; as though she had no feelings that required to be considered and no rights that needed to be respected.

At times this happens to a superior from a subject, as was the case of the material expectoration in the story; again it occurs to a subject from a superior; and in other instances it is inflicted upon a Sister by an equal in rank. On all occasions, however, the Holy Spirit offers His grace of solace in weeping so that they who respond to it feel happy and grateful, after the example of St. Francis Borgia, because of the abuse aimed at and heaped upon them intentionally or unin-

tentionally, convinced as they are that they deserved it and more for their many offenses against God.

*The Toy of Jesus*

St. Teresa of the Child Jesus, the so-called Little Flower, and one of the most responsive subjects of the Holy Ghost, in her beautifully simple and childlike way, writes of her method of suffering whatsoever trials and tribulations: "I had offered myself to the Infant Jesus to be His toy and I had told Him to use me . . . as a little ball of no value, which He could throw on the ground, kick with His feet, let lie in a corner, or press to His heart, just as He pleased. In a word, I wanted to entertain the Infant Jesus and abandon myself to His childish caprices."

This sounds mystically poetic, romantic, and fascinating. We admire it as it stands and reads. We are envious of the saint for being so willing a plaything of the divine Infant. But all this will not avail us a particle if we do not imitate her charming example and, when the occasion offers itself, as it does in some phase or other of our convent life day for day, we are not ready to have our Lord use us as He chooses through our superiors, subjects, or fellow Religious: either throw or kick us about—figuratively,

of course—or ignore us completely; or press us to His heart in delicious consolations.

*She Wanted Love*

When, on the eighth of September, 1890, the saint pronounced the sacred vows, she had on her heart a slip of paper on which her most fervent desires were inscribed in these words: "O Jesus, my divine Spouse . . . all I ask of You is peace. Peace, and most of all, love: love without limits and measure. Jesus, let me die as a martyr for You; give me the martyrdom of the heart and the body . . . Let no one be concerned about me; and let me be forgotten, and trodden under foot as a grain of sand."

Jesus heard her prayer. To be trodden under foot in some way or other, and to have her heart crushed with sufferings remained her great delight and her supreme desire unto the moment of her passing to a better life. It was no one else than the Holy Ghost Who was the continual solace in her weeping. If in this retreat we learn but one thing, namely, to enjoy being downtrodden, in an alliterative way, by our fellow Religious, whether by those over us or under us or parallel with us; it will mean a striking advance on the way of true perfection and solid holiness.

*A Cane In God's Hands*

St. Francis of Assisi, from whom St. Teresa of the Child Jesus learned a great deal of her holy simplicity and childlike love, even as her great patron in the Carmelite Order, St. Teresa of Spain, had learned much of her seraphic love from the same Assisian saint, used to tell his brethren that the perfect friar was like a cane in the hands of God, inasmuch as he never complained about or in any way balked at God's disposition regarding him through the agency of his fellow friars and others. A cane, he said, acts the same if it is left at home in an obscure corner, or if it is carried in public parade with ostentation and pomp; if it is unadorned and unpolished, or if it is decorated with ribbons and tassels; if it is used to lean on, or if it is employed to give directions, say to beat the time for and keep unison and harmony in a band of music; if it is broken in pieces and thrown into the fire to burn, or if it is nicely ornamented and reverently placed in a museum as a conspicuous relic. Similarly, said the saint, should a friar behave morally in all the divers conjunctures of convent life. With men, it is true, this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. And the Holy Ghost renders this extra-

ordinary and heroic feat of patience and resignation possible through His abiding grace by which He is solace in weeping.

*An Old But Ever New Story*

The story, variously told as to detail, is old but ever new and full of comfort and inspiration to the Religious that weep in convents because of real or imaginary mistreatment. One day while St. Francis was discussing these matters with his beloved and faithful companion, Brother Leo, who had imbibed much of the saintly simplicity and ingenuousness of his spiritual father, and was telling him that only by being the ready and compliant cane in God's hands, as was described above, could a friar hope to experience heavenly joy, the saint of a sudden turned to Leo, saying: "Tell me, Brother Leo, what is heavenly joy?"

*Brother Leo Demurred*

The good brother replied that he was in no position to give any information on heavenly joy to one whose conversation was in heaven (*vid.* Philipp., 3, 20), who had again and again been transported to heaven in visions and ecstasies, and who was therefore best qualified to answer his own question

and describe true heavenly joy. When Leo, therefore, demurred at answering from fear of being lost or going awry on the subject, Francis himself proceeded after this manner: "Brother Leo, if I were the greatest preacher in the world; so much so that people would come from far and wide, even from distant foreign countries, to hear me preach the word of God; and while I preached, the most rabid infidels would be converted to the true faith in large numbers, the hearts of the most hardened sinners would melt unto fervent compunction, and all the faithful would be filled with an unbounded enthusiasm for the religion of Christ and its wondrous messenger, saying that since the time of the apostles the like of me had never been heard before: would that be heavenly joy?" Brother Leo opined that it would seem to be heavenly joy, or at least border very closely on it. "No," rejoined Francis, "that would not be heavenly joy."

*The Counterpart of Solomon*

"Brother Leo," the saint then continued, "let us suppose I were the most erudite doctor of theology on earth; I occupied the most celebrated chair of learning in the first university of the world, and was known as its foremost and unrivaled teacher; from

everywhere students would be attracted by the glamor of my name to sit reverently and admiringly at my feet and eagerly and gratefully drink the knowledge I dispensed to them; the books I wrote would fill every reader with admiration and inspiration, and they would spread at once over all the world in innumerable copies after being translated into every language of the globe; the entire universe would stand aghast at the possession of so much, such deep, and varied erudition on the part of one man; everyone would acclaim me as the modern counterpart of Solomon of old because of the acumen and correctness of my wisdom, and the vastness and accuracy of my knowledge, comprising everything that is knowable to man: would that be heavenly joy?" The brother again deemed such a condition to surpass mere earthly pleasure and to savor of the joy of heaven. "No," insisted Francis, "neither would that be heavenly joy."

*The World Would Be Astounded*

"Brother Leo," he then went on, "if I had the gift of working miracles freely, promiscuously, and indefinitely: I could at will multiply bread, change water into wine, quell the storms and command the sea to be calm, cure the sick and quicken the dead; I

could give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, and perfection of form to the halt, palsied, and maimed; I could reveal things hidden from all mortal eyes, and peer into the future and reveal its mysteries with lavish profusion and unfailing inerrancy; all the world would be astounded and would acclaim me a man of God without compare and as one of the great prophets of old risen from the dead: would that be heavenly joy?" Brother Leo again ventured to suppose that to him it seemed to be heavenly joy, or anyway as near as anything could approach it. "No," reiterated Francis, "that, too, would not be heavenly joy."

*The Night Was Cold and Dark*

By this time the good brother began to despair that there was anything like heavenly joy to be found on earth at all if the instances mentioned did not constitute it, when St. Francis resumed, saying: "Brother Leo, if you and I in a cold, dark, and rainy winter's night were traveling on our mission tours, exposed to all the rudeness and rawness of the elements: we were weary and exhausted from our long walking in the heavy mud, so much so that we could hardly drag ourselves along any more no matter how much we

tried; we were on the point of starvation for want of something to eat; we were shivering all over for our lack of sufficient clothing; what rags covered us were dripping wet from the rain; and in consequence of our bodily distress our soul were heavy and sad; in this condition we would suddenly come upon a convent of our friars; cheered by this unexpected good fortune we would knock at the door and humbly ask for admittance and help in our dire need; the porter, however, would chide us most bitterly for coming at so ungodly an hour to awaken him from his sleep; he would call us lazy tramps and unworthy scamps while he coldly and brusquely slammed the door against us to leave us once more as helpless victims to the cruel and heartless treatment of the elements: this, I say, Brother Leo, would be heavenly joy."

*He Tasted Heavenly Joy*

While you read this you may be saying within yourself: It takes a saint of the stamp of St. Francis to think of anything so mystically poetic and romantic as this, and to regulate his conduct accordingly. No doubt there have been but few saints who tasted such heavenly joy and relished it in so high a degree as the great lover of Jesus Christ

Crucified who, like St. Paul, bore the marks of Christ upon his body, and whose life's motto was that of the same apostle, viz.: "For to me, to live is Christ: and to die is gain" (Philipp., 1, 21).

But in their degree and measure there are doubtless a goodly number of Sisters in your community who practice the same virtue of selfless and heroic suffering for the love of Jesus and the sanctification of their soul. And while they suffer thus, in putting up with the direct and indirect insults, slights, and rebuffs that come to their address from their fellow Sisters and others, they experience within themselves the joy of heaven, thanks to the indwelling in their souls of the Spirit of Jesus, Who is to them an inexhaustible source of "solace in weeping".

*Sister Mary and Sister Ann*

It may not be without benefit, therefore, if for their and your encouragement we modernize the beautiful reverie of St. Francis and imagine, for example, a Sister, who is far enough advanced in the spiritual life and in the obvious possession of true holiness, saying to another nun, who has full confidence in her and is eager to be taught by her the ways of God and genuine holiness, in this wise: "Sister Mary, tell me what is

heavenly joy and when, in your opinion, would one of our Sisters be in the best condition to relish it?" In the simplicity of her heart the humble nun would reply: "Sister Ann, why do you, who live so close and intimate and continuous a life of God, in God, with God, and for God, ask me, who am altogether inexperienced in the things of the spirit and the anticipated joys of heaven, to tell you what is heavenly joy? I want to learn from you what this joy is and how to come by it. Please teach me, I pray you."

*She Had the Highest Degrees*

Sister Ann would then go on: "Sister Mary, if I were the most learned and erudite nun, not only in our community, but in the entire country, yea, in all the world; I would have obtained the highest and most enviable degrees in science and philosophy and other departments of knowledge from the most prominent and exacting universities at home and abroad; because of my discoveries in various sciences revealed in my books, I would continue from year to year to be the recipient of honorary and very flattering degrees from the representative schools and scientific societies of every nation on earth; not only numberless pupils would flock to our schools and ask for admission in our

community because of my name and prestige, but celebrated scholars would hail from everywhere to get my view on scientific problems that agitate them and my answer to questions of knowledge that perplex them; and in each case they would look upon me as an oracle of wisdom and erudition and consider my utterance as the last word on the subject: would that be for me heavenly joy?" Sister Mary would express her belief that in her lowly opinion it would indeed be very much like heavenly joy. "No," Sister Ann would reply, "that would not be heavenly joy."

*The Most Clever Nurse*

"Sister Mary," Sister Ann would then proceed to say, "if I were the most clever, adroit, and accomplished nurse that has ever been known to function in a hospital or elsewhere; not only the patients and their relatives and friends, but also the Sister and lay nurses, yea, the doctors themselves, would be dumbfounded at the depth and sureness of my knowledge of medicine and therapy, at the infallibility and readiness of my diagnosis, at the uncanniness with which I invariably found and successfully applied the proper remedies of diet, medicaments, and care in each and every case; so much so that our hospital became the mecca of grate-

ful patients who over-crowded its rooms and wards as soon as we could build and add them; and of nurses who desired to achieve perfection in their chosen field of work; and also of physicians and surgeons, many of them men of national and international fame, who were eager to watch my methods, imitate my ways, copy my tactics, and learn from me the extreme reach of their science and art; and again, in consequence of my fame, pupils would come in crowds to learn nursing in our school and apply in multitudes to be received in our community: would that be heavenly joy?" Sister Mary, in her guilelessness, would once more hazard the declaration that in her mind it would at least be very similar to heavenly joy. "No," Sister Mary would repeat, "neither would that be heavenly joy."

*The Most Wonderful Executive*

"Sister Mary," she would then expatiate, "if I were the most wonderful executive in our or any other community; the wisest superior; the ablest administrator and most inspiring leader; I had a way of attending to the material and spiritual needs of the Sisters with unexceptionable punctuality, unimpeachable fairness, irreproachable kindness, and blameless perfection; I succeeded

in winning the grandest and most liberal patrons for our community who literally smothered us with their princely donations and embarrassed us with their unceasing kindness to a degree that our surplus money more than supplied the needs of all the houses of the order; moreover, being kind without being soft, firm without being hard, vigilant without being meddlesome, attentive without being officious, I had a knack of keeping all the Sisters in perfect religious contentment, peace, love and joy, so that there never was the least ruffle in our happy convent existence nor any disturbance whatever in the even tenor of our life in God; meanwhile, through my example and inspiration, the Sisters would advance rapidly from one stage of perfection to another, and keep on adding holiness upon holiness every moment of their lives; every year, when chapter approached, all my subjects would instinctively and spontaneously draw up a pleading petition to have me retained as their superior, if it could possibly be done, in the interest of their happiness and spiritual profit; year after year their petition would be granted, with the required dispensation, and the longer I was their superior the more attached they grew to me, the higher they esteemed me, and the more fondly they loved me: would

that be heavenly joy?" Sister Mary, ravished by this description of unheard of success, could not help judging that it would indeed be heavenly joy, for this earth could give no such joy. "No," Sister Ann would insist, "even this would not be heavenly joy."

*Evil Days Come Upon Her*

By this time Sister Mary would about despair of hearing anything that bespoke heavenly joy in this life, when Sister Ann would resume, saying: "Sister Mary, if, as the world and even some of the Sisters view them, evil days would come upon me; once in dignity and honor, I should be suddenly demoted and disgraced; once a great favorite with the superiors, I should be cast off by them in ignominy and shame; once possessed of considerable power and prestige, I should be reduced to moral impotency and inanity; once admired, loved, and applauded by the nuns, I should be blamed, shunned, and despised by them; my glory was faded; my star set; my reputation gone; a cloud of ugly suspicion gathered over me with hardly a redeeming feature of a faint gleam in the shape of confidence and attachment preserved in my behalf by a single Sister; my soul was in sadness, my spirit in gloom, and my heart

was broken; in addition corporal illness would afflict my body and rack it with pain while it left me no hope whatever of ever finding relief from its tortures, let alone a complete and lasting cure: this, I say, Sister Mary, would be heavenly joy. Under the influence of the divine Paraclete, Who is my solace in weeping, and Who would send me the comforting angel whom He sent to Jesus in His agony, I would cry out with cheerful resignation: 'Father . . . not what I will, but what Thou wilt' (Mark, 14, 36). 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, Who comforteth us in all our tribulation . . . For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us: so also by Christ doth our comfort abound . . . Who also hath sealed us and given the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts' (2 Cor., 1, 3, 4, 5, 22)."

No reader of this book but has some opportunity or other to taste this kind of heavenly joy day for day. May we heartily thank God for these precious visitations by making the most of them when they come.

# LECTURE XIII.

## The Endurance of Loneliness
## The Gift of Tears

> "*They were all filled with the Holy Ghost*" (Acts, 2, 4).

If the virtuous endurance of persecution, especially of cloistral persecution, is a sign of considerable ascetical education or perfection in a Religious, the godly sufferance of loneliness is perhaps even more of a credit to a Sister striving for sanctity. In general persecution seems to be easier to bear than loneliness. Opposition from others rouses us to virile self-defense, and adverse criticism stirs our best powers into action. Loneliness, however, has a tendency to attack us from within by inclining us to be sad, melancholy, and depressed which is a far more dangerous procedure than any outward attack, since it threatens to weaken the very source of our power which is an honorable self-confidence, hopefulness, buoyancy, and alacrity of spirit.

### *She Feels So Alone*

It is true that at times the feeling of loneliness in a Religious is an accompaniment or a consequence of persecution. If so, it must be

dealt with together with its cause or accessory. But not infrequently a Sister who is not being persecuted in any way she is aware of is troubled with a nameless feeling of utter loneliness. She weeps often and profusely for no other reason than because she feels so all alone, altogether forsaken and abandoned. What she has she does not want. What she wants she cannot have. The companions about her do not appeal to her. Those whose company she would relish are far away from her. She herself cannot account for or describe her forlorn condition. She only knows she is bereft of something she needs and has a vague and undefinable longing for it without any hope of attaining it: but just what it is and why she wants it, she is at a loss to say.

*She Eats Ashes Like Bread*

All she can do is to say with the Psalmist: "Hear, O Lord, my prayer: and let my cry come to Thee. Turn not away Thy face from me: in the day when I am in trouble, incline Thy ear to me . . . I am become like to a pelican of the wilderness: I am like a night raven in the house. I have watched, and am become as a sparrow all alone on the housetop. . . I did eat ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping" (Ps.

101, 2 *sqq.*). If she says this prayer with faith and trust, no matter how intense and chronic her loneliness may be, the Holy Spirit will be to her, too, "solace in weeping."

A few reflections on cloistral loneliness, which is not an uncommon affliction by any means, may help its victims to bear it more patiently and overcome it more readily. If not checked betimes, loneliness brings on melancholy and produces discouragement; discouragement leads to despair; and despair is the most fatal of all mental and spiritual attitudes. It is almost always responsible, altogether or in part, for the defections or apostasies from religious life. More than one nun has lost and is now losing her vocation through yielding to loneliness and its morbid results in the mind, heart, and will. In addition to this, or barring this ultimate disaster, many cloistral irregularities are perpetrated from the mere desire to fly from loneliness.

### *The Nerves Are Weak*

Oftener than not the feeling of loneliness is due to a physical or physiological condition. The nerves are weak or deranged. Their reaction to ordinary stimuli is not normal. In consequence the person feels blasée, as the French put it. Nothing stirs, thrills, or moves

her. Nothing appeals to her or provides her with normal excitation. She feels limp, numb, torpid, and inert. And what renders her condition worse is that, in her view, no one cares, or has any interest in or sympathy for her.

Sometimes this feeling of loneliness is due to constitutional abnormalities or distempers. As soon as they are removed by care and, if necessary, by medicine, the feeling of loneliness ceases. The lack of physical exercise is not seldom the source of the annoying feeling of loneliness. A good, brisk, and sensible daily walk, wherever this is possible, can do much to forestall or chase the feeling of loneliness.

*Loneliness Is a Universal Affliction*

Loneliness is by no means restricted to convents; nor is it more indigenous there than elsewhere; neither is it necessarily more frequent in small convents, or such as are situated in rural and quite absconded districts, than in large convents and such as are in the midst of large and busy cities. Many hermits in the desert of old, who hardly ever met and had social contact with other human beings, and were practically always alone, were never lonely. Their experience

was that of the ancient philosopher who said: "I am never less alone than when I am alone."

There are Sisters who are plunged in work and who in their profession meet various kinds of people all the time, who are still very lonely. Others there are who lead what seems a very monotonous and uninteresting life, but who are never lonely. This proves that we must not be too hasty in attributing our feeling of loneliness to our situation, work, or lack of work, or environment.

*The Cause Lies In Ourselves*

Usually the cause of our loneliness lies in ourselves: in our physical or spiritual condition. If it is not due to a physiological cause, over which for the moment we may not have any control, it may be due, and often is due, to a voluntary psychological cause for which we are responsible. It is a fault of character, a lack of training in will power, a want of that self-mastery which every normal person ought to possess.

Women living in the world, young and old, married and unmarried, in every class and profession of secular occupation, are as lonely and more so, in proportion, than Sisters in convents. The reason many girls and young ladies run into eccentricities and extra-

vagances of conduct, which expose their virtue to danger and their good name to ruin, is often no other than their desire to evade or escape from loneliness. They hate it and fear it more than anything else. They want excitement, distraction, and diversion, so they can get away as it were from themselves and forget themselves for the time being. Even if their search for pleasure and entertainment often ends in disillusionment and chagrin, they prefer it to the tortures of loneliness.

*Maiden Ladies Are Lonely*

The loneliness of secular maiden ladies is proverbial. The extent of it may be exaggerated, for there are many maiden ladies or bachelor girls who are never lonely, since their lives are filled out with the best and most worthwhile pursuits: but there is no doubt foundation enough for the popular belief that single blessedness in the world is often associated with loneliness. And the fear of this loneliness drives many a girl into marriage who does not particularly desire it from other motives.

A large number of married ladies, some of them well and happily married, apparently, are very lonely, in spite of having considerable families to rear and households to main-

tain. One is not a little surprised at times to have a married woman, having a good husband and several nice children, complain of being unspeakably and almost intolerably lonely. In all these and similar instances the loneliness in question is due to the same causes that were mentioned above, more or less; and the cure must respond to the causes in every case if it is going to be effective.

But what is the purpose of citing the experiences of secular women in a book for nuns? Merely to show the universality of the affliction which we are now discussing. Somehow we feel a trouble less and we can dispose of it with more good sense and confidence if we are aware that we are not solitary victims of it, but that it is a common inheritance of all the sons of Adam as well as all the daughters of Eve.

*Like a Headache*

Once a Sister, therefore, who is subject to fits of loneliness, reflects that it is quite a common ailment, say something on the order of a headache in the physical life; and that with few exceptions all the Sisters of her and every other community are threatened with it at some time or other of their religious life; and that if she had remained in the world she might have had more severe attacks of it

than she has now: she will be in a more favorable position to view her visitation in a sane light; to bear it philosophically and virtuously; to treat it sensibly and, as a result, to relieve it considerably, or banish it entirely. The lonely Sister, too, can recall to her profit the words of St. Peter: "Dearly beloved, think not . . . as if some new thing happened to you" (1 Peter, 4, 12).

*The Nun Has More Resources*

The lonely nun has a great advantage in her tribulation over the lonely women living in the world inasmuch as she has better and readier means of meritoriously enduring and gradually vanquishing her loneliness in the convent than a secular woman ordinarily has. The nun has more sources of spiritual help and comfort that allay and chase loneliness. In other words, she is or can be in more various ways and in a greater measure the beneficiary of the divine Paraclete Who is "solace in weeping". He will, first of all, dispose her to look upon her distress, whatever may have been or be the remote or proximate cause of it, as a trial sent her by God for a wholesome purpose. The consciousness of this will incline her to accept it cheerfully from His loving hands, and to bear it with childlike resignation, even as she would

bear any other suffering, knowing the while that the endurance of it will make for her spiritual profit and improvement.

*Saints Were Often Lonely*

The greatest saints, in their way, had their periods of acute spiritual loneliness. They felt completely abandoned not only by men but also by God. St. Teresa of Jesus in her autobiography gives us gripping descriptions of the feeling of extreme forsakenness that came over her and tortured her relentlessly for the longest time in her quest of perfection and holiness. Perhaps this trial more than many others, in consequence of her meeting it with faith, hope, and love, was responsible for her rise to the highest pitch of sanctity.

Countless other saints before her and after her, and many of them living today in our American convents, for that matter, often have had and have occasion to say with the inspired writers: "My soul hath cleaved to the pavement: quicken Thou me according to Thy word" (Ps. 118, 25). "I am become burdensome to myself" (Job, 7, 20). "When wilt Thou comfort me? for I am become like a bottle in the frost" (Ps. 118, 83). "My heart is troubled, my strength hath left me: and the light of my eyes itself is not with me" (Ps. 37, 11). "I am poured out like

water; and all my bones are scattered. My heart is become like wax . . . and Thou hast brought me down into the dust of death" (Ps. 21, 15, 16). "I said in the excess of my mind: I am cast away from before Thy eyes" (Ps. 30, 23).

*The Zenith of Loneliness*

The climax of our Lord's suffering was reached partly in the Garden of Gethsemane when for sheer loneliness and depression of spirits our Lord asked that, if it was possible, the chalice might pass from Him; and mostly at His approaching death on the cross when "Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying: . . . My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt., 27, 46.)

It is worthy of note that the only two times our divine Savior pleaded with His Father regarding His sufferings was when loneliness possessed and weighed Him down. Everything else in His passion, however bitter and hard it may have been, He seemed to take as a matter of course without any comment whatever: but when utter loneliness and dereliction overtook Him He could not refrain from making a filial utterance regarding it to His Father. This brings into relief the prominence of loneliness in the sufferings

assigned to the saints by God in order to render them similar to His Son and partakers of His glory.

*Stigmatization*

There are a number of pious Sisters who manifest a keen interest in cases of stigmatization which have been reported as being observed in our own day. They love to hear of the famous case in Bavaria, of the other somewhat less known one in New York, and still another in Italy. When an eye witness tells them of what he or she saw in regard to these or similar cases, they are all attention and eager to learn every detail connected with the extraordinary occurrence. They read all they can put their hands on relative to these unusual phenomena. They are not a little jealous of the persons who are the subjects of stigmatization, and they yearn with all their heart and soul to be the beneficiaries of such a wondrous heavenly favor.

To receive the sacred stigmata—by the way, I am writing this on the feast of the Stigmatization of St. Francis, who was the first saint in history of whom we have a distinct record that he had the sacred wounds of our Lord upon His body, and the only one whose stigmatization has been solemnly en-

dorsed by the Church through the institution of a universal feast—is no doubt a most signal distinction. Of itself, however, it does not constitute a meritorious act which increases one's fund of sanctifying grace and celestial glory, as little as does the gift of miracles bestowed upon a person.

*A Better Gift*

A Sister will do far better, then, if instead of bearing the marks of Jesus upon her body in a supernatural but real formation she bears the sufferings of Jesus in her soul for love of Him. And since, as was said above, no suffering seems to be greater, intenser, and consequently more meritorious in the eyes of God than spiritual dereliction and utter forsakenness, the nun who is vouchsafed a good portion of this valuable suffering thanks God for it from her heart, and in the midst of nature's most urgent and pathetic pleading rejoices that she is privileged to suffer after the manner of Jesus so that, "when His glory shall be revealed," she "may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Peter, 4, 13). St. Francis would never have received the marks of the crucified Jesus on his body, or they would not have availed him a particle if he had, had he not previously through long years of heroic endurance of fierce bodily

sufferings and spiritual tribulations attuned his soul to the highest love of Jesus crucified and the closest resemblance to Him.

*She Left Jesus Alone*

A Sister who is suffering from loneliness may be assisted in enduring the severe ordeal joyfully for the love of Jesus by remembering how in years gone by, when she was still in the world, or even after she had already donned the livery of Jesus Christ, she often left her Lord and Master alone, sighing for her presence, and pining for her love, while she went about her own earthly diversions and pursued her own pleasures regardless of Jesus' desire to have her for Himself in the intimate converse of prayer and the sweet communion of mystical love. Finally, nothing qualifies a nun more to be sympathetic and benevolent towards her fellow Sisters and others who are afflicted with loneliness than if she herself has had a thorough experience of the same dire affliction. She, then, in her turn becomes to many the angel of the Paraclete Who is "solace in weeping".

*Negative Progress*

Sisters weep at times not for the various causes already mentioned, but because of their slow or negative progress in the spiritual

life, on the road to perfection, and in their struggle after holiness. Before they entered the convent they had great dreams of future sanctity which they felt sure they would achieve within a very short period after their assumption of the cloistral veil. They were convinced nothing would or could stop them in their determined flight to God and the acquisition of all the virtues He desired them to be adorned with.

Alas, they were not long in the house of God when their first fervor began to wane and their religious optimism grew pale. They found that virtue and holiness are grand to dream of and sweet to rave over, but not so easy to acquire. The incessant longing, the ceaseless strife, the dogged persistency which are necessary to become a saint soon told on them and wore them out. They began to relax and slide back to their former attitude of more wishing than doing, and more resolving than acting.

*No Sign of Progress*

The result was that what little sanctity they had achieved they soon lost, and ere long they returned to the level of virtue with which they had set out to attain the highest grade of holiness. They have now spent ten,

twenty, thirty or more years in the convent, and if they are going to be candid with themselves they must own they are not a particle holier, if they are as holy: in fact they are evidently less holy now than when they forsook the world and gave themselves to God so that they might be holy even as He is holy.

This reflection saddens them not a little. They feel a keen remorse for having practically wasted so many years in the special school of holiness without advancing a single degree in it. And it only adds to their sorrow and self-reproach when they compare themselves with other Sisters who entered the order with them or after them, and who are to all appearances far ahead of them in solid virtue and the genuine love of God. In view of the great disproportion between their youthful dreams of holiness and their actual attitude towards it now, in their maturer years, the Sisters in question cannot restrain their tears. They are tears of sincere and humble self-incrimination and self-depreciation.

### *Her Tears Stamp Her As Holy*

These tears have a high value before God and bring substantial fruitfulness to the soul. Their very shedding is a sign that their cause is more imaginary than real. If the Sister

involved really possessed no sanctity she would not miss its absence, much less admit it, and least of all cry over it. The fact alone, therefore, that she cries for not being holy, is rather a sign that she is holy. The advance in holiness usually holds pace with the disbelief in it on the part of the one concerned.

As long as we think we are saints and congratulate ourselves inwardly and outwardly on being saints we have only a smattering or less of sanctity. The holier we become, on the contrary, the less we are aware of and satisfied with the progress we are making. The psychological explanation of this is that holiness is essentially associated with humility. Humility begets a habit of sincere and relentless self-inspection. Close, candid, and continuous self-inspection discovers faults that before were hidden, and sees flaws in virtues which before seemed perfect. Consequently, the holier a Sister grows to be, the less she esteems and the more she hates herself.

### *A Holy Envy*

A further sign that a nun is a saint or is approaching sanctity is her virtuous envy of other Sisters because of the holiness she believes to spy in them. It takes real humility

to own that others are better than we are; and considerable charity to believe that they are saints. To envy them in a virtuous way for their sanctity manifests an understanding of, and a desire for, sanctity in the subject of the envy. No doubt they whom the particular Sister considers to be holy and far better than herself entertain the same view and sentiments with reference to her at their expense. And both are the holier for it.

With suggestions, intimations, and whisperings of this nature the Holy Ghost assuages the grief of the Sister deploring her want of perfection. As Moses, at the direction of God, sweetened bitter waters for the Jews in the desert, so the Spirit of God delights into turning the bitter waters of self-reproach into sweetness, in order to function to the soul as "solace in weeping".

*The Bitterest and Sweetest Tears*

The tears which Sisters shed most, and which in their shedding are at the same time the bitterest and the sweetest, thanks to the divine Paraclete Who sweetens them, and which are far and away the most precious in God's sight and the most profitable to the soul that sheds them, are the tears of sorrow and compunction, of genuine perfect contri-

tion, which the Sisters weep for their personal and actual sins, committed before or since their reception of the habit. Every such tear has an immense and incalculable value before God. Hence, Sisters do well to save their tears as much as possible for this particular weeping. This salutary weeping also comprises in a special manner the shedding of tears for those for whose sins the nuns in question feel they were in some way responsible. These tears are counselled by our Savior when He says: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over Me; but weep for yourselves and for your children" (Luke, 23, 28).

*Why Waste a Good Tear?*

It is a great pity to shed a tear for nothing, so to say, while yielding to some inordinately sentimental attachment to creatures, when the same tear, shed for true sorrow for sin, would make the weeper the recipient of vast and eternal treasures, while advancing her swiftly in the highest love of God. It is a commonplace among spiritual writers that one tear of perfect contrition is sufficient to extinguish the fires of hell for the most guilty sinner for whom the justice and wrath of God had already fanned the flames of hell to seven times their usual heat in order to

punish him for his enormous iniquities. The same tear shed by a Spouse of Christ who is already in the state of grace exerts a proportionate power in increasing her love of Jesus and augmenting her celestial wealth.

*A Touching Myth*

Among the Persians is handed down a sweet and touching myth. One day the Deity sent an angel with the commission to go and find the prettiest and loveliest thing on this earth and bring it to heaven. The angel searched long and wide until he came to a battlefield upon which lay a wounded soldier who was dying slowly and painfully, yet cheerfully, for his country. The angel reverently gathered a drop of blood which was oozing from the soldier's wounds, being convinced it was the most beautiful thing on earth, and carried it to heaven. Here he was told by the Deity that, precious as was that drop of blood, the earth contained something grander than it.

The angel renewed his search. He chanced to meet the solemn public funeral of a great benefactor who had befriended hundreds and thousands of the poor and friendless. Among the attendants at the funeral were crowds of widows, orphans, and other victims of misery who were shedding tears of the warmest

gratitude. The angel respectfully caught and carried one of these tears to heaven, being quite certain that nothing nicer could be found on earth. Again the Deity declined it, saying that, beauteous as was that tear, the earth contained something more admirable still.

*The Most Beautiful Thing on Earth*

Once more the angel resumed his quest. Then he met a man who had sinned, but who was filled with genuine, deep, and burning sorrow for his sins. As his eyes were upturned towards heaven in the moonlight, humbly pleading for pardon, hot tears of penitence streamed down his cheeks. The angel caught one of these tears and brought it to heaven. The Deity accepted it, declaring: "This, indeed, is the most beautiful thing there is on earth."

In truth, what could be grander than true and perfect contrition, proceeding from the pure love of God? And if this tear is precious, pretty and charming in God's eyes, no matter from what sinner's eyes it flows, we have reasons to believe that it assumes a particular beauty and grandeur in the sight of Jesus when it flows from the eyes of His own dear consecrated bride who deplores her infidelities to Him, whether big or little, whether recent

or of long standing, with all the bitterness of her soul, all the love of her heart, and all the devotion of her being.

How sweet these tears can become we learn from the example of the saints of the old and new testaments. In his exemplary penance for his great sins King David gave a prominent role to his tears. He enjoyed shedding them so much that he says: "Every night I will wash my bed: I will water my couch with my tears" (Ps. 6, 7).

*He Needed a Good Cry*

The gospel tells us that St. Peter, after coming to from his frightful sins of cowardice, "going forth, he wept bitterly" (Matt., 26, 75). He felt he needed a good cry. His remorse-stricken soul clamored for relief in tears. His whole nature, now that he realized how unfaithful he had been to Jesus to Whom he had shortly before publicly and solemnly pledged his loyalty unto death, urged him to wash away his guilt with tears. Therefore he went forth. He wanted to be alone, so he could cry freely, abundantly, and unrestrainedly to his heart's content. This he did, not only on that one occasion but as long as he lived, especially when a crowing cock recalled to him the baseness and magnitude of his sins; so much so that tradition tells us

that the hot and frequent tears of the penitent apostle gradually dug furrows in his cheeks. He must have enjoyed shedding them, indeed, to keep up the practice so long and so ardently.

*Her Most Delicious Moments*

Many a Sister spends her sweetest and most delicious moments in her cell or in some other secluded and private place imitating King David and St. Peter in letting her tears flow day and night in the remembrance of her disloyalties to her divine Spouse. And each tear that trickles from her loving eyes adds a new pearl of priceless value to her crown in heaven.

Mary Magdalen, too, is another classic example of how sweet and delicious the tears of the bitterest penance can become when they are sweetened by the divine Comforter, Who is "solace in weeping". She enjoyed the shedding of them to such a degree that the flow of burning tears of love and sorrow was sufficient to wash the sacred feet of her Redeemer. And she was so delighted with the process that she gladly used the second occasion to wash our Lord's feet in the same tender and penitential manner. No thrill in her previous sinful life had ever afforded her nearly so much joy as she experienced while

shedding the tears of sorrow and love over her Savior's feet. There are ever so many nuns who derive their greatest delight in their convent existence from their mystical washing of the feet of Jesus, their beloved Bridegroom, with the warm, loving, and copious tears of their intense and unremitting penance.

*The Gift of Tears*

How dear to God these tears are is evidenced by the fact that every now and then He rewards them by giving to the penitent the so-called gift of tears which qualifies him or her to weep incessantly and to experience the consolations and sweetness of heaven in the weeping. St. Francis of Assisi possessed this gift in so high a degree that he almost lost his sight entirely through his continuous tears. But the delightful experience of them, vitalized as it was with the ecstatic love of Jesus, was immensely more precious and welcome to him than the sight of any earthly object could ever be.

It is worthy of remark that while the Roman Missal does not contain a prayer for the gift of stigmatization, for instance, to be inserted in the Holy Mass at the option of the priest on days when the rubrics permit it, it has such a prayer for the gift of tears.

In the eyes of the Church, then, the gift of shedding a profusion of tears for our sins and for the love of God and from a spirit of gratitude for His gifts is in itself more valuable and desirable than the privilege of stigmatization.

"*The Place of Tears*"

The annual retreat more than any other period gives the God-loving, and sin-hating, and penitence-stricken nun ample occasion and rich stimulation for the shedding of tears of sorrow and love. It should therefore be a renewal of the scene described to us in the Book of Judges. An angel of the Lord recalled to the Jews all the benefits God had conferred upon them, together with His promises of reward in case they remained faithful, and His threats of punishment if they became unfaithful, to Him. "And when the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the children of Israel, they lifted up their voice, and wept. And the name of that place was called, The place of weepers, or of tears" (Judges, 2, 4, 5). During the retreat this chapel, too, should become the place of weepers or of tears. The more the Sisters weep from contrition, love, desire, and homesickness for their heavenly Spouse, the greater is their prospect that God will one

day say to them and of them: "I have seen thy tears: and behold I have healed thee . . . Thou shalt go up to the temple of the Lord" (4 Kings, 20, 5). "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne, shall rule them and shall lead them to the fountains of the waters of life: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Apoc., 7, 17).

*The Retreat Confession*

No feature of the retreat elicits a nun's tears more powerfully than her preparation for and her performance of her retreat confession. She usually has it to be a most sincere, candid, comprehensive, and contrite review of the time that has elapsed since her previous retreat. As a rule it is not advisable to cover a greater period in the retreat confession. The business man who carefully audits his books every year, never, save in extraordinary cases, hauls out the books of previous years in order to go over their accounts again. Of course, when an exception is warranted, the nun may comprise a larger space, yea, her whole life, in a retreat confession.

With regard to the retreat confession also it is wholesome to pursue the three oft mentioned purposes of the retreat. If her retreat confession is going to be particularly

humiliating and painful to her, as it will likely be, she will remember that it is to serve, first of all, as an atonement for all her sins and faults committed in relation to the sacrament of penance since her last retreat.

*She Did Not Like Confession*

Maybe she was guilty of evident depreciation of this precious sacrament by receiving it comparatively seldom. And when she went to confession, she did so reluctantly, half-heartedly, and almost protestingly and rebelliously. Her sincerity, candor, and contrition were in proportion to her attitude: not essentially wanting, yet also not of a nature as to guarantee her much fruit from the reception of the sacrament. In consequence her religious life noticeably lost its spirit and she gravitated towards tepidity in a menacing way.

Or she had the misfortune to allow herself by her moral weakness or human respect to be decoyed into making sacrilegious confessions by wilfully concealing mortal sins in the sacred tribunal, or by consciously omitting such circumstances as added one or more serious sins, or by not being minded to quit the grievous sins she was confessing.

*She Indulged Scrupulosity*

Possibly, too, she failed regarding the holy sacrament of penance through indulging her weakness of scrupulosity by not heeding the advice of her confessor and disobeying his directions. She thereby not only deprived herself of the sweet peace of soul which our Lord mainly intended to convey by means of the sacrament of penance, but also, indirectly, at least, cast a reflection upon the infinite mercy of God, of which the sacrament of penance is the most distinct and emphatic expression. By her attitude she practically perverted what God designed should be a vehicle of His boundless goodness and heavenly peace into an instrument of unbearable mental torture and unspeakable worry to the soul.

Whatever her sins or faults in this important matter have been, a nun can atone for them all sufficiently and abundantly by a good, humble, and dolorous retreat confession. She will not shrink from the ordeal of it, no matter how odious and repellent the devil or her pride may try to picture it unto her. Because of her love of God and her concomitant hatred of herself she rather enjoys her retreat confession the more, the more it irks, stings, crushes, and effaces her. The more it hurts her, the more convinced

she is of its element of atonement in her regard, and the more she rejoices that it is accomplishing the very purpose she wants to attain by it.

*Now She Can Make the Test*

In the second place, the retreat confession, with all the leisure and other advantages she has at her disposal to prepare herself for it, and duly perform it, gives the nun the occasion she craves throughout the entire year of testing herself to see just how well she can receive, and how much fruit she can derive from the reception of, the sacrament of penance. In case she should naturally shrink from the difficulty of it, which she considers altogether personal and unique in her case, she will man herself to courage and unflinching readiness to perform her duty in the matter by recalling the practical advice of St. Peter: "Dearly beloved, think not strange the burning heat which is to try you: as if some new thing happened to you" (1 Peter, 4, 12). She will derive comfort and encouragement from remembering that quite a number of other Sisters are in the same spiritual predicament as she is. If they are willing to escape from it through the merciless immolation of their pride why should

she, through senseless folly and fatal conceit, shrink from the salutary sacrifice and thereby forfeit the great reward of it?

*The Delicacy of Conscience*

Finally, in the third instance, a thoroughly good and effective retreat confession is sufficient to return to her a nun's true spirit respecting the sacrament of penance together with the habit of its periodical worthy and fruitful reception. She will do what she can to receive it every week, if possible, with a wholehearted, although not a morbidly scrupulous, preparation and thanksgiving. Since nothing is so apt to conserve the delicacy of conscience as the hebdomadal worthy reception of the sacrament of penance, this one effect of the retreat will be sure to keep a Religious on the straight and narrow path "that leadeth to life" (Matt., 7, 14).

# LECTURE XIV.

## The Light of Hearts

*"They were all filled with the Holy Ghost"* (Acts, 2, 4).

In addition to the titles attributed to the Holy Ghost in the verse of the sequence which we have been considering, there is another title given Him in the same sequence which we shall dwell on with profit to our soul in the holy retreat. The Holy Spirit is called "the light of hearts": "lumen cordium".

They relate of the greatest poetical genius of Germany, Goethe, that on his deathbed he muttered: "More light!" He was a man of vast knowledge and startling erudition. Yet in regard to the other world and eternity, towards which he was now tending fast, he was in utter darkness and complete ignorance. Hence he pleaded for more light. He pleaded too late. His first quest for knowledge should have been directed towards knowing God, his own immortal soul, and his eternal destiny. His fatal mistake was that the knowledge which he should have acquired first, and to the acquisition of which he should have devoted most of his time, energy, and talents, he showed only a vague and veiled

eagerness for when he was dying, and when there was no time to impart it to him any more.

*Timely Provision*

In the convent, especially during the period of the holy retreat, we follow the contrary method. We want the light of heaven to flood our soul while we still are in a position to profit by it. We desire to obtain all the knowledge we possibly can of God and the future life and our everlasting goal, so that when the time comes to go to God into eternity to be assigned our fate forever we shall not need to cry for more light, since the light we had was sufficient to lead us safe and happy to the haven of salvation. We obtain an abundance of this light in the retreat by calling upon the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, saying in the words of the Church: "Veni lumen cordium!"—"Come, Thou light of hearts!"

*A Spotlight*

The Holy Ghost is a most unusual and unique light. He gives the soul an insight into and views of things and persons it never had before, and which it cannot obtain without the aid of His heavenly light. The light of reason or mere philosophy or com-

mon sense are weak and flickering lights compared to the all-possessing, all-absorbing, and all-embracing light of the Holy Ghost. They are like pale and fitful candle lights compared to the noonday sun, when they are contrasted with the light of the Holy Spirit. In as far as we can do it without irreverence we may say that the Holy Ghost casts a powerful spotlight into our souls upon the objects He wants to reveal to us or of which He desires to give us the proper conception and appraisal.

From the experience of the apostles in the first retreat of Christendom we can glean what those objects are upon which the Holy Ghost turns the divine spotlight of His instruction in the soul of the nun in retreat. St. Augustine mentions the two main objects in his well-known prayer: "O Lord, let me know Thee, and let me know myself!"

*Faint and Shadowy*

The first thing the Paraclete taught the apostles was Jesus Christ. He gave them a new vision of our Lord, revealing to them His beauty, goodness, truth, and divinity in a manner far surpassing all the apprehension they had ever had of the personality and character of our Savior. Before the Holy Ghost came down upon them the apostles

were satisfied that they knew Jesus thoroughly: but after He descended upon them and enlightened them they realized how faint and shadowy had been their knowledge of Jesus even when they declared and believed, as Peter did, that He was the Son of the living God.

The knowledge the Holy Ghost gave them of Jesus not only enlightened their minds so they would know Jesus better than ever before, but also inflamed their hearts so that they loved Him more than they ever did. Before this enlightenment their love of Jesus consisted more in words than in deeds. It was not proof against dangers and temptations, as the history of the passion sadly proved. But as craven as the apostles were in their attitude regarding Jesus before the Holy Ghost poured His light into their hearts, so brave they became in their consecration to Jesus when they received this benign and powerful light.

*The Name of Jesus*

After being scourged for having preached the Name of Jesus, "they indeed went from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the Name of Jesus. And every day they ceased not, in the temple and from

house to house, to teach and preach Christ Jesus" (Acts, 5, 41, 42). The change in their conduct was entirely due to the added information they received from the Holy Ghost with reference to Jesus Christ. After knowing Jesus the way the Holy Spirit exhibited Him to their minds and hearts they could not do less than love Him with unswerving loyalty and undying attachment. Even the revelation of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration did not produce upon the apostles who witnessed it the effect exerted upon them by the conception of Jesus given them by the Holy Ghost, the "light of hearts".

*The Illumination of the Heart*

On the Mount of Transfiguration the revelation accorded them enlightened the eyes of the apostles who witnessed it, whereas the Holy Spirit in the cenacle enlightened their hearts. Outward visions are of little value if they are not accompanied by internal enlightenment. Even mental or intellectual illuminations are not a supernatural and eternal asset if they are not paralleled by the enlightenment of the heart. In this sense the Imitation of Christ says that to feel or have contrition is immensely more profitable than merely to know how to define it theologically.

Many Sisters have a clear knowledge of and can discourse brilliantly on faults they themselves are addicted to and virtues they lack. They are not wanting in light of the mind. The reason they cling to their faults and neglect to acquire the virtues they need in spite of their better knowledge is their lack of the light of the Spirit in their hearts. As soon as He illumines them the Sisters in question will change for the better at once. Their hearts or, what is the same, their appetitive faculty, their wills, need more attention than their minds.

*At the Gates of Damascus*

The supernatural transformation brought about by the light of the Holy Ghost in the apostles as to their attitude towards Jesus Christ comes very clearly and pronouncedly to view in the conversion of St. Paul at the gates of Damascus. The same Spirit of God Who illumined the disciples of Jesus in the cenacle on Pentecost Day enlightened St. Paul respecting Jesus, as the persecutor of the Church approached Damascus.

The Bible says: "Suddenly a light from heaven shined round about him" (Acts, 9, 3). It was the light of the Holy Ghost. After its shining round about Saul, through him, and in him, the fierce hater of Jesus

Christ was converted at once into the greatest lover of Him, due to the knowledge he acquired of our Lord through that wonderful light.

*Not Another Mortal Sin*

Sisters do not enter the retreat as enemies or haters, but as friends and lovers, of Jesus. In them the transformation accruing from a better knowledge of Jesus cannot be so antithetical and extreme as in the case of Saul. They are rather in the condition of the eleven apostles in the cenacle who entered it with the love of Jesus in their hearts; but this love was capable of much improvement and stabilization, both of which were effected through the light of the Holy Ghost illuminating them with regard to their Master and Leader. After this illumination or increase of knowledge of Jesus they found it easy and sweet to remain unflinchingly true to Him in the face of the greatest hardships and most violent persecutions. Theologians hold that after this illumination they were confirmed in grace, inasmuch as none of the apostles ever committed another mortal sin after the Holy Ghost came down upon them.

Since "the hand of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save: neither is His ear heavy that it cannot hear" (Isaias, 59, 1),

there is no reason why the same grand effects cannot be realized in the Sisters who take part in this retreat through a clearer and more comprehensive knowledge of their heavenly Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. Nothing more than this is needed to transform the most unhappy and disgruntled nun into the happiest and most contented Sister in the community. And the same is true with reference to every other disaffection or imperfection or sinful passion possessing a Religious and restraining her from getting as close to God and permeated with holiness as her profession bids her to be.

*The Secret of Happiness*

The secret of all the happiness of religious life and the source of all its strength is contained in the beautiful declaration of Jesus: "I know mine, and mine know Me" (John, 10, 14). The Sister who always bears in mind that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knows her thoroughly, individually, and personally; all her traits and characteristics; all her virtues and frailties; her strength and weakness; her high aspirations and her mediocre achievements; her splendid dreams and ordinary attainments; her noble purposes and commonplace executions; her nervous complex and its various reactions to her com-

panions and other surroundings; the temptations that beset her and the dangers that confront her: who moreover reflects that Jesus, as He called her to be His bride, and accepted her as such forever in her final profession of vows, promised to be with her always as a tower of strength and a bulwark of defense to her: this Sister cannot grow faint-hearted and low-spirited in trials and difficulties; but she will man herself to new courage and alacrity, exclaiming: "The Lord is my light and my salvation: Whom shall I fear?" (Ps. 26, 1.)

*The Source of Life*

It was in this sense that Jesus declared: "Now this is eternal life: That they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent" (John, 17, 3). Not only a nun's eternal life, but also all her temporal life and happiness on earth are derived from her knowledge of Jesus Christ. Whenever a Sister is low-spirited, therefore, dejected, and despondent in the pursuit of cloistral perfection and finds the convent life and its various duties irksome and galling, she shows a lack of the proper knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord could address her as He did the Samaritan woman who tarried in giving Him

the drink of water He had requested of her, saying: "If thou didst know the gift of God and Who He is that saith to thee: Give me to drink" (John, 4, 10). If she had a better apprehension of His relations towards and purposes regarding her, what now repels her would fascinate her, and what she now winces under would rejoice her.

*An Embarrassing Question*

If someone asked you quite abruptly the question that was asked the spouse in the Bible: "What manner of one is thy Beloved of the beloved?" (Cant., 5, 9), could you describe His divine and human personality, goodness, and loveliness as glowingly, exultingly, and ecstatically as the spouse described the beauty of her lover? Maybe your knowledge of Jesus, instead of being thoroughly personal, sweetly familiar, and beauteously intimate, is merely scientific, purely historic, and obviously superficial.

With reference to Jesus your knowledge of Him is perhaps like the incipient vision of the man who was being cured of blindness and who, "looking up, said: I see men, as it were trees, walking" (Mark, 8, 24). So blurred and hazy may still be your actual and workable knowledge of Jesus Christ, your own heavenly Spouse, and this despite

your ten, twenty or more years in the convent which you entered with the avowed intention to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter, 3, 18). To you Jesus could say what He said to His disciples: "Do you not yet know nor understand? Have you still your heart blinded?" (Mark, 8, 17.) "Have I been so long a time with you and have you not known Me?" (John, 14, 9.)

In this retreat the Holy Ghost, by being the light of your heart, will remedy your condition so that, even as the man cured of blindness, you will end the retreat by seeing "all things clearly" (Mark, 8, 25) relatively to Jesus. You will "be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, to know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge" (Ephes., 3, 18, 19).

*The Heart's Prominence*

When Jesus exhorts us to study Him He adverts to the knowledge of His heart. "Learn of Me," He says, "because I am meek and humble of heart" (Matt., 11, 29). He does not want our knowledge of Him to be merely gleaned at a distance from Him or from the surface of His external appearance or conduct. He desires us to enter into

His Heart and search its goodness and sweetness. Regarding all our cloistral experiences He wants us to sound the motives actuating His divine Heart in sending them to us or permitting them to overtake us. This knowledge of His Heart will preserve us in continuous, sweet, and cheerful conformity with His holy will, whatever may betide us.

*A Sudden Reversal of Form*

Often the revelation of a single favorable trait in one whom we very much dislike is sufficient to turn us completely and forever in his favor. And if we are told that a superior, to whom we may have an attitude of indifference or coldness, is minded to promote and elevate us signally, we at once conceive for him a warmth of admiration, gratitude, and love. Why should not a nun, therefore, who enters the retreat with love and devotion to Jesus, be most favorably impressed by the manisfestation of new and most lovable traits in her own dear Spouse, and especially when she becomes cognizant, through the light of the Paraclete, of the high designs for her eternal glorification which Jesus entertains regarding her?

Zacheus "sought to see Jesus Who He was" (Luke, 19, 3). Before the day was over he learned not only Who Jesus was,

but also how wondrously gracious and generous Jesus was to Zacheus. As long as a nun comes to the retreat "to see Jesus Who He is", she will not leave it without learning how marvelously grand and liberal He is to her, and she will exclaim with delight: "O how good and sweet is Thy Spirit, O Lord, in all things!" (Wisdom, 12, 1).

*Woman's Nature*

By nature woman wants to have someone who is interested in her; cares for her; rejoices with her in her successes and condoles with her in her disappointments; shares her joys and divides her pains with her; thinks fondly of her; longs eagerly for her when she is absent, and is respectfully and lovingly attentive to her when she is present; who listens sympathetically to the outpourings of her heart's secrets, whether glad or sad, with the promise of the utmost confidence; who is never importuned by her approach, nor wearied by her requests for advice, light, consolation and help; who hears her every prayer, and complies, often in anticipation of it, to her faintest call for assistance, encouragement, refreshment, devotion and love.

*A Unique Lover*

To the good nun, if she knows Him as He is, Jesus is all this and more. In the feature of wholesouled attachment to and solicitude for His consecrated spouse, Jesus is unique, unparalleled, and unapproachable. He allows no earthly bridegroom to come within any distance at all to rival or even to seem to rival Him. A Sister has but to remember all this and whatever else her own spiritual experience and elevated fancy will supply in this regard in order to be supremely happy in all the vicissitudes of convent life, and to sense within herself the truth of the assertion of the Imitation of Christ that paradise is where Jesus is.

In a well-made retreat Jesus is revealed to a Sister through the operation of the Holy Ghost in a much higher degree, it is true, but somewhat after the manner of His transfiguration recorded in the gospel. "His face did shine as the sun: and His garments became white as snow . . . And Peter answering, said to Jesus: Lord, it is good for us to be here" (Matt., 17, 2, 4). Even as St. Peter on the mount so the nun, seeing Jesus endowed with so much irresistible beauty and overwhelming loveliness, exclaims from the depths of her soul: "Lord, it is good for us to be here!"

*A Nun's Transformation*

Whatever difficulties she may have had in regard to convent or community life before, and how often and furiously she may have been tempted to discontinue it: now that she has a new view of Jesus and a better conception of His divine and human charms, she dismisses once for all every negotiation with the weakness of her nature, or the suggestions of the world, or the whisperings of the devil, and says valiantly, joyously, and finally: "Lord, it is good for us to be here!" "This is my rest for ever and ever: here will I dwell, for I have chosen it" (Ps. 131, 14).

Through a good retreat a nun becomes like St. Stephen, the first martyr, who, "being full of the Holy Ghost, looking up steadfastly to heaven, saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And He said: Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts, 7, 55). Because of this vision of Jesus the holy martyr did not feel the blows of the stones on the one hand; and on the other he found it easy to say with all his heart regarding his cruel persecutors: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (*ib.*, 59).

*A Glimpse of Jesus*

In the same way, when once the Religious, being full of the Holy Ghost, gets this glimpse of Jesus in His glory and love in a mystical manner, she cheerfully bears up under every kind of domestic or alien persecution and all kinds of trials and afflictions. She forgives her enemies readily and generously. And with reference to her conduct and speech in and out of the convent will be verified what the Bible says of her saintly model: "Stephen, full of grace and fortitude, did great wonders and signs among the people . . . And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit that spoke" (Acts, 6, 8, 10).

*God's Caresses*

While the Holy Ghost reveals from every angle the beauteousness and amiability of Jesus to the nun in retreat, He brings out in a particular manner the fascinations of her divine Spouse in reference to herself: His predilection for her; His extraordinary bounties to her; His special protection of her, notably on this or that occasion; His desire to be loved by her and to have her enjoy the sweet manifestations of His love for her, especially when His caresses take the shape of trials and tribulations which she is asked to bear patiently for love of Him, since He

sends them to her merely out of pure love of her. "For whom the Lord loveth, He chastiseth" (Hebr., 12, 6). "Such as I love," says Jesus in the Apocalypse (3, 19), "I rebuke and chastise." In answer to this conduct of her Spouse the good nun declares: "I bless Thee, O Lord God of Israel, because Thou hast chastised me, and Thou hast saved me" (Tob., 11, 17).

*The Man of Sorrows*

Moreover, the Holy Spirit reveals Jesus to the nun in retreat in a more vivid, appealing, and captivating manner than ever before as the man of sorrows, "despised and the most abject of men . . . and acquainted with infirmity" (Isaias, 53, 3). The Spirit of Jesus whispers to her in the words of the prophet: "Surely He hath borne your infirmities and carried your sorrows . . . He was wounded for your iniquities: He was bruised for your sins. The chastisement of your peace was upon Him: and by His bruises you are healed . . . He was offered because it was His own will, and He opened not His mouth" (*vid.* Isaias, 53, *passim*).

*Her Sins Did It*

He will remind the Sister of the particular sins by which she reduced her Savior to a

state in which there was "no beauty in Him, nor comeliness and . . . . no sightliness". And he looked like "a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted" (*ib*,, 2, 4). He will recall to her the first mortal sin she ever committed and by which she forfeited her baptismal innocence. He will bring back to her mind the first grievous sin she was guilty of as a Religious through the serious and wilful transgression of a vow or the grave violation of charity or some other virtue. He will have her remember the greatest sin she ever perpetrated in her whole life. He will conjure before her all her personal sins and also the sins of others to which she was accessory. In case the sin of sacrilege entered her life, it, too, will stand out before her in all its ghastliness and horror.

*Specters of the Past*

The Holy Ghost does not conjure these specters of the past before her in order to depress, discourage, and undo her: but to bring out as by way of contrast the infinite love of Jesus for her Who gladly bore all her sins and had God to lay her iniquity upon Him. Emblazoned and glorified by the light of this boundless love for her, Jesus even in His bleeding, faint, maimed, and mangled

form is in her eyes the hero of all heroes, the grandest, dearest, most beauteous and lovable of men, the King of kings to Whose sway alone she surrenders herself completely, Who alone has all her adoration, and Who is and ever will be the exclusive object of her love.

Because of His very unsightliness, assumed for her sins, and His appearance of leprosy, contracted for her iniquities, He is invested with an added charm in her sight and clothed with a loveliness that arrests, overpowers, and enchants her forevermore. "From henceforth," she exclaims with St. Paul, "let no man be troublesome to me;" "for" as He bore the marks of my sins on His body, "I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body" (Gal., 6, 17). By this she means she is willing and eager to suffer as much, according to her capacity, for the love of Jesus, as He endured for the love of her. "I to my Beloved," she says, "and His turning is towards me" (Cant., 7, 10).

*The Spirit of Zeal*

The Holy Spirit throws a strong and winning light into the soul of the nun in retreat on behalf of Jesus in His zeal for souls, in order to inflame her with a similar desire to work and suffer and pray for the salvation of immortal souls. "I am come to

cast fire on the earth," said Jesus, "and what will I, but that it be kindled? And I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized. And how am I straitened until it be accomplished?" (Luke, 12, 49, 50.) The loving soul of the devoted Sister catches this fire in herself and begins to burn with the desire of Jesus to work for souls according to her ability and opportunity. She says with St. Paul, afire with zeal: "I live, now not I: but Christ liveth in me" (Gal., 2, 20).

She will thank God above all that she was given a vocation in life which more than any other enables her directly or indirectly to be instrumental in saving the souls that somehow come under her influence. In this light she likes to view her holy calling and thereby she rises above all the petty difficulties and annoyances that attach to it because of the infirmity of human nature. She prizes and cherishes it intensely and would not exchange it for any profession in the world. With St. Denis, the Areopagite, she holds that to labor for the salvation of souls is the most divine of divine works. Hence she never has the least inclination to envy any secular woman her ephemeral fame, or fabulous wealth, or passing pleasure, or meteoric distinction in society, or transitory adoration on the stage or screen, or fleeting power of conquest and

patronage, occupied as she herself is heart and soul in the grandest and most productive work that can engage the attention, enlist the talents, invite the ambition, and absorb the energy of woman.

*The Baptism of Blood*

The baptism our Savior was so eager for was the baptism of His passion and death. He longed for it with supreme ardor because by it He was to redeem mankind. He lost sight entirely of His own pains in His thirst for the salvation of souls. His sufferings were altogether negligible over against the object He was to achieve by them. As the docile pupil, as well as the loving spouse, of Jesus, after the Holy Ghost brings out prominently this charming trait of Him in her soul, the pious nun more and more imbibes the zeal of Jesus, and also begins to make light of all the sufferings she has to endure in cooperating with Jesus in redeeming souls, no matter from what sources these sufferings come, what particular phase they assume, and what degree of pain they cause her. She not only makes light of them but, after the example of her divine Model, she desires them longingly, and she is straitened until they come upon her to qualify her for the sublime work to which she has dedicated herself.

*She Thirsts for Souls*

Jesus kept on being parched with an unquenchable thirst for souls unto His very death. One of His last exclamations on the cross was: "I thirst!" His chief thirst was for the redemption of the souls of all men, which seemed to grow stronger, the nearer His end came. Jesus died enduring the pains of it. In a similar way the nun whom the Holy Ghost enlightens regarding the character and personality of Jesus in reference to this subject never lets up in her thirst for souls.

The longer she is in the convent the more she seems to be consumed by it. The pall of old age, far from extinguishing the fire of her thirst seems rather to fan it to a greater heat until she dies with the prayer of St. Francis Xavier on her lips: "Da mihi animas:" "Give me souls." She imitates the great imitator of Christ, St. Paul, and declares her life's motto, saying: "I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls: although loving you more, I be loved less" (2 Cor., 12, 15).

*Her Zeal Is Catholic*

As Jesus was willing to be hated unto death so souls might be saved, she is willing to die a martyr expressly or virtually in

order to be a co-laborer with Christ in the work He came upon earth to do. And as the love of Jesus embraced the souls of all men, so she, too, has her zeal for souls to be Catholic and all-comprehensive. She is interested not only in her own little sphere of influence, or that of her community or order, but also for "those things that are without".

Her "daily instance", after the example of St. Paul, who contracted Jesus' thirst for souls in the highest degree, is "the solicitude for all the churches". "Who is weak," she says with the Apostle, and I am not weak? Who is scandalized, and I am not on fire?" (2 Cor., 11, 28, 29). By her prayers and mortifications, by contributing material help or work of her own, by soliciting help from and enlisting the active cooperation of others for the assistance of the home and foreign missions and the various pious and charitable works of the Church at home and abroad, and especially by awakening and nursing vocations for the religious and priestly state, in keeping with her condition and the provisions of the rule of her community, she says again, silently but eloquently, with St. Paul: "I became all things to all men, that I might save all. And I do all things for the gospel's sake, that I may be made partaker thereof" (1 Cor., 9, 22, 23).

*She Sees Herself*

Besides giving the nun in retreat a clearer and more engrossing knowledge of Jesus Christ, which of itself denotes a most salutary retreat, and is always the first and best fruit of every retreat, the Holy Ghost gives her a correlative knowledge of herself, lucid, genuine, and just, which supplements the knowledge of Jesus in her and renders it more powerful upon her, particularly by way of contrast. When the Holy Spirit throws the spotlight of His divine illumination upon her character, and brings into relief all her personal littleness, cravenness, selfishness, and infidelity, she admires and loves Jesus more in proportion to her virtuous contempt and detestation of herself, and grows more appreciative and grateful towards Him than ever because in spite of her unworthiness He has not only chosen her, but also keeps on bearing with her, as His own dear and consecrated spouse.

*The Wrong Mirror*

Without the aid of the Holy Ghost, and following the bent of unregenerate nature, in our appraisal of ourselves we are prone to use for our real or pretended virtues a convex mirror that magnifies them unto grotesque proportions which, however, to

us, blinded as we are by our self-love, do not seem at all exaggerated; while for our faults and sins we like to employ a concave mirror that minimizes them unto insignificance which, again, seems quite just to us. In our estimation of others, notably of those whom we dislike, we follow the contrary process. We minimize their virtues and magnify their shortcomings.

We use the same unfair and deceiving method as to our successes and failures, relatively, and the successes and failures of others; also as to our and their prominence, fame, and prestige, or the lack of them. In all these and similar phases of life we employ the aforesaid double standard: using the convex or concave mirror just as it suits our pleasure and self-love. It was, no doubt, with reference to this common human weakness that the Psalmist cried out: "I said in my excess: Every man is a liar" (Ps. 115, 11).

*The True Mirror*

The Holy Ghost, however, teaches us the just method of applying to ourselves, as well as others, the mirror that reflects the truth as it is. A good nun is eager for and heartily welcomes this celestial enlightenment. "For everyone that doth evil hateth the light and cometh not to the light, that

his works may not be reproved. But he that doth truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest: because they are done in God" (John, 3, 20, 21).

"Who art thou? . . . What sayest thou of thyself?" (John, 1, 22.) This question, which the Jews put to John the Baptist, should occupy a nun more or less throughout the entire time of the retreat directly or indirectly. In answering it she will above all be distrustful of her own testimony, and look to the Holy Spirit for true guidance. To her, in her unguarded testimony in favor of herself, apply literally the words which the Jews blasphemously hurled at Jesus: "Thou givest testimony of thyself. Thy testimony is not true" (John, 8, 13).

*Glorying is Dangerous*

Even Jesus said, referring merely to the logical or court value of self-attestation: "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing" (*ib.*, 54). You can say this without reservation of any kind. You have much more reason to be cautious in believing your own testimony on behalf of yourself than was St. Paul who said: "Neither do I judge my own self. For I am not conscious to myself of anything. Yet am I not hereby justified: but He that judgeth me is the Lord" (1 Cor.,

4, 3, 4). "He that glorieth may glory in the Lord" (1 Cor., 3, 31).

Here on the one hand a Sister is taught to beware of the fault of the Pharisee, than which none is more offensive to God, and not to flatter herself, saying: "O God, I give Thee thanks that I am not as the rest of (Luke, 18, 11) the Sisters, especially as this or that companion of mine: indolent, selfish, self-indulgent, vain, jealous, unduly ambitious, intriguing, double-dealing, hypocritical, and the like. I fast and pray and am truly humble and disinterested in everything I say or do. I have no care for my own honor or comfort, but look only to the glory of God and the best interests of His Church and our order. If all the Sisters were like myself, we should need no retreat. Ours would be a home of veritable saints." Such a nun would belong to the category of those whom Jesus characterized thus: "You are they who justify themselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts. For that which is high to men is an abomination before God" (Luke, 16, 15).

*Self-Adoration*

The vanity and conceit to which human nature is prone are cleverly brought out in the ancient myth of Narcissus who, when

for the first time he saw his reflection in a limpid pool of water, became so enamored of the beauty of it that he became insane from admiration and love of the wondrous figure.

We somehow retain as long as we live this tendency to at least partial insanity at beholding ourselves not only in material mirrors, but also in the highly partial mental appraisal of ourselves. As long as we are in the flesh we shall never be entirely free from a strong leaning towards self-adoration, aware as we may be in our innermost self, that we could not adore a more false god.

*A Safe Glory*

On the other hand, however, the words of the Bible quoted above teach the pious Sister that she may have reason to glory, and the Holy Ghost will point it out to her, not because of her own merits, but because of God's infinite goodness to her in helping her to fall more and more in love with His service, her holy habit, and the consecration of which it is a symbol; to acquire one virtue after the other, and shed fault upon fault from year to year; to have success with her work for His glory, and the souls of men, and the advancement of the credit of her

order; in a word, to love her divine Spouse more and more from day to day, and increase correspondingly in grace before God and men, and to rise prospectively in the glory that is awaiting her in heaven. Yet, she "that glorieth may glory in the Lord".

*Degrees and Books*

A distinctive feature of this glory is that it takes no cognizance of those achievements which give a Sister credit in the eyes of the community and the world at large, such as promotions to high dignities; the acquisition of distinguished degrees; the publication of celebrated books; the erection of new buildings; or the establishment of new houses or provinces. Because of the glory easily accruing to her from others in view of these accomplishments, and also the temptations of vainglory assailing her in their pursuit, many of which she perhaps dallied with not a little, she fears she may have already received her reward (*vid.* Matt., 6, 2).

For this reason she rather concentrates her investigation of herself upon the acquisition of interior virtue and religious perfection, both of which are grounded on true humility and self-depreciation. If, through the all-revealing searchlight of the Holy Ghost, she finds that she has improved or, at least,

maintained herself in them without a deficit to her discredit, she modestly and gratefully glories in the Lord.

*As Others See Us*

One day our Lord asked His disciples: "Whom do men say that I am?" (Mark, 8, 27.) It would do us all good at times to see ourselves as others see us. If to a nun in retreat were revealed the opinions regarding her which are entertained by her fellow Sisters, though they are not always expressed, it would be a revelation to her, indeed. Then she would need no retreat-master to point out her faults and to give her a modest appreciation of herself, her dignity, exploits, talents, and sufferings: but she would likely need one to keep up her courage and maintain her in any kind of religious optimism.

Her friends might attribute virtues to her she does not possess, or exaggerate those she has; yet this would not be of frequent occurrence. She would rather be in a position to try out all the humility she had not only because of the charges, suspicions, intimations, and innuendoes of her enemies, but also to a certain extent because of the sinister impressions, unfavorable views, and irritating misgivings of her friends in reference to her. In both instances, again, her

friends as well as her enemies, although in a different degree, are prone to minimize the virtues they commend and to exaggerate the faults they censure in her.

*Stoning In Convents*

In some religious communities is practiced the ceremony called in Latin: *lapidatio;* in English: stoning. When it is performed in open chapter, in presence of the entire house, the victim or object of it is called out before all the members. These are then bidden by the superior to prefer in a loud and clear voice whatever charges they can make against the Religious in question. Every member is at liberty to say frankly what exception he or she takes to the conduct of the one that is being stoned, who in his or her turn is expected to listen to all the accusations with humility and docility of heart.

If this could be done in your regard in the retreat, so that all the Sisters could and would speak their mind openly with reference to the things they disapprove of in your manner and conduct, no doubt your eyes would be opened to self-knowledge as they have never been opened to this day. On the other hand, the procedure might not

make for your heartening and quickening in the spiritual life; but it might produce a great and lasting depression of spirits and loss of animation. Yet possibly it will profit you to imagine such a ceremony in your regard, and to ask yourself sincerely: "Whom do the Sisters say that I am?" And if a wee small voice tells you certain things the Sisters say or might say against you with truth and justice, it will not be at all to your detriment to set about deploring and correcting them.

*She Likes Public Stoning*

At this juncture more than one Sister will be saying within herself: "I should heartily welcome the ceremony of public stoning, referred to above, in our community, if it meant the complete cessation of private, stealthy, and whispering stoning that incessantly goes on in our order. One can learn and properly evaluate what is said in public and, if need be, defend herself against the attacks made on her, and expose the meanness of the source and the vileness of the motives of them. This a Sister cannot do respecting the insidious, furtive, and perfidious private accusations and suspicions made against her privately." There is a

foundation for such a wish: but who will guarantee that when the Sisters agree on the public "lapidatio", they will scrupulously forego every private stoning?

*The Predominant Passion*

There are two things in particular which the Holy Ghost brings out with signal prominence in the bestowal of true self-knowledge upon a nun. First, He throws a mercilessly piercing and all-disclosing light on her predominant passion which is either ruling or trying to rule her to her spiritual disaster. He lets her know her status with reference to it: whether she has gained or lost in her control over it since the last retreat; and in either case he acquaints her with the amount of her gain or loss and the reasons for either.

He again manifests to her the great jeopardy in allowing any margin or granting any quarter to her ruling passion which by one victory over her can destroy the entire spiritual edifice of years, and transform her splendid prospects of salvation into frightful forebodings of perdition. He reminds her once more of the best means wherewith she can keep the menacing passion in check, and even use it as a source of great merit and a vast accumulation of celestial treasures.

*Good and Bad Mingle*

It has well been said that no one is so good that he has not something bad in him; and no one is so bad that he has not something good in him. As a contrast to the ruling passion the Holy Ghost, therefore, in His communication of self-knowledge, also emphasizes the need of paying attention to one's prominent virtue. Even as the Sisters who fail in Religion and lose their holy vocation invariably come to their sad end through their predominant passion to which they give free reins, so the Sisters who become saints usually, if not always, achieve sanctity through the outstanding virtue with which nature endowed them and which they develop unto holiness through the help of God's grace.

*Native Weakness*

As everyone has a certain pronounced leaning towards evil by his very nature or temperament—it is ordinarily called his native weakness—: so everyone by nature has a peculiar tendency towards good. The evil native inclination, if it is not properly checked, but unduly indulged, unfailingly leads to moral and spiritual ruin. The good native inclination, if it is wisely nurtured and consistently developed with the aid of the

grace of God, leads to perfection and sanctity. Grace does not destroy or act in opposition to nature; but it purifies and elevates it. It uses what is good in human nature as a foundation upon which it erects the stateliest building of exquisite holiness. As important as it is, therefore, for a nun to explore her predominant passion in order to repress it, so necessary it is for her to know her preeminent virtue in order to develop it. By curbing the one she evades perdition; by fostering the other she attains heaven. No nun, therefore, will quit this retreat without knowing definitely what passion in herself she must particularly frown on, and which virtue in herself she must especially encourage.

*A Liability Becomes an Asset*

In truth, a Sister will usually find that her predominant passion can be converted from her greatest liability to her strongest asset in the spiritual life. All that is necessary is that she restrain it from the pursuit of illicit objects or from immoderation in the cultivation of licit objects; and that she exploit it towards the acquisition and practice of virtue and the love of God. As a strong person ordinarily goes to defeat through her strength, so a weak person can

rise to success through her weakness. With the grace of God she can turn her predominant passion into her outstanding virtue. "Power is made perfect in infirmity" (2 Cor., 12, 9).

*A Wet Blanket*

Finally, the Holy Ghost enlightens the nun in retreat not only respecting Jesus and herself; but He also gives her a clear knowledge of her neighbor, or her fellow Sisters. There may be one or the other Sister whom she thoroughly dislikes, and for whom she has a feeling of what she considers invincible aversion and antipathy, of recent date or of long ago. She is convinced she cannot overcome or get rid of the ugly feeling, which throws a wet blanket over all her cloistral happiness and impedes every step she takes towards religious perfection.

By His heavenly light the Holy Spirit will illumine her in such a way regarding the object of her revulsion, that she will find the person to be not only pardonable, but also quite lovable. He will impress upon her that the very fact that she is a spouse of Jesus, and wears the same habit she does, whatever may be her personal oddities and irregularities, are a title to reverence and credit which is not erased by anything she may be, do,

or say. Here, again, the revelation of a single good trait in the disliked person is sufficient to turn aversion into favor, and hatred into love.

*The Only Ones We Can Hate*

They say the only ones we can really hate are those whom we do not know. Once we get to know a person from every point of view, and make due allowance for the things in her for which she is personally not responsible, and imagine how we might fare if we had the same handicaps he or she has to fight against, we are inclined to dismiss all bitterness in his or her regard and have it to make room for kindly consideration and generous sympathy. By doing this we should but be doing unto others as we want to be done by.

We are no doubt knowingly or unknowingly as great an object of displeasure to others and dislike as this or that person is to us. We are convinced that, if they who cannot suffer us and are tempted to hate us would but know us as we really are, they could not continue in their apathy and antagonism against us. Why not pursue the same line of reasoning with reference to those whom we cannot endure, and act accordingly?

*Between the Best and the Worst*

Between the best of us and the worst of us the difference is so slight that it should not even be made a point of discussion, let alone a barrier of estrangement or a source of hatred or wilful aversion. It does not take the Holy Spirit long, in case you are willing to perceive and admit it, to show you some very lovable trait in your bitterest enemy, and to make you be charmed by it so strongly that you will at once condemn yourself for feeling so mean and malicious towards the person concerned, and you will tender this person your heart's spontaneous forgiveness, appreciation, and love.

Such is the influence upon the willing and expectant soul of the nun in retreat on the part of the heavenly Paraclete, "the light of hearts," Who not only enlightens the mind but also inflames the heart, so that His beneficiary not only sees truth, beauty, and goodness everywhere, but also loves and pursues them unto holiness and happiness forevermore.

# LECTURE XV.

## Spiritual Reading

> "*They were all filled with the Holy Ghost*" (Acts, 2, 4).

Besides keeping aloof from the world, observing silence, and devoting themselves to prayer during their retreat in the cenacle, the apostles earnestly and consistently pursued spiritual reading. They read the Holy Scriptures both privately and in common. They dwelled chiefly on those parts of the Old Testament which refer to the effusion of the Holy Spirit. Through this reading they comforted and heartened themselves unto patient waiting for the descent of the Paraclete Whom Jesus had promised them. At the same time they thereby made the time of the retreat appear delightfully short.

### *Hand In Hand*

After prayer, vocal and mental, there is nothing more apt to maintain a nun in the religious spirit, which means a high appreciation and an ardent pursuit of her holy calling, than the practice of good, judicious, and attentive spiritual reading. If apostasy from the religious life is invariably preceded and,

in a way, prepared by the neglect of prayer, the neglect of prayer is usually preceded and brought on by the wilful omission of spiritual reading. Contrariwise, even as the degree of a nun's prayer is ordinarily a safe indication of the degree of her holiness—St. Augustine says: As a people prays so it lives—so her measure of devout and deliberate spiritual reading may be looked upon as the gauge of her prayer. The two go hand in hand, supporting, supplementing, and inspiring one another.

*Man Is What He Eats*

An ancient Latin proverb says: "Homo est quod est": "Man is what he eats." Corporally the truth of this is evident, since the body absorbs and assimilates only what it receives. Mentally and spiritually the same law prevails. The soul absorbs and assimilates only what is somehow supplied it. A very rich source of mental, spiritual, and religious provision is good and wholesome reading. The more of this the zealous nun does, in keeping with her condition and capacity, the more prospect she has of growing in perfection and holiness.

Nothing is ever reduced to human action which is not first in the mind as a distinct idea and in the will as a deliberate purpose.

Good and wise reading is one of the richest wells of great spiritual ideas and high religious purposes. Whoever, therefore, wilfully and wantonly foregoes all spiritual reading in private as well as in public deprives herself of one of the strongest factors of spiritual fervor and religious perseverance.

*She Was Worried*

There are exceptional cases of Religious getting on rather nicely in the spiritual life without the aid of private spiritual reading. I recall the instance of a good and pious Sister, the superior of a large hospital, who, after she had heard me emphasize in the retreat I was preaching the advantages and relative necessity of spiritual reading, came to tell me in all timidity of heart that she herself did not have the taste or the patience ever to read a single spiritual book. She added, however, that God had given her a remarkable relish for prayer. She enjoyed praying, the longer the better. She also had a taste for hospital work. She could hardly abstain from it. I assured her, of course, that in view of her striking gift of prayer and her love of hospital work she did not need to worry at all about her lack of inclination for spiritual reading.

*Close Allies*

Still this was an unusual occurrence. As was said above, prayer and spiritual reading are very close allies; so much so that great masters of prayer, such as St. Teresa of Jesus, advise those who find it difficult to practice mental prayer to supply their deficiency by reading a good book with lingering concentration and devotion.

St. Francis of Assisi, in his rule for the Friars Minor, exhorts the lay brothers, who do not know how to read or write, not to attempt to learn it. The saint gave this counsel not from a depreciation of the value of wholesome knowledge in general, or of spiritual reading in particular, but from a desire to restrain the brothers from an inordinate ambition for learning, which threatened to render them dissatisfied with their lowly position of simplicity and humility, and to make them aspire after the fame and prestige of knowledge and erudition.

*The Folly of Excess*

Nowadays, when everyone knows how to read and write, in convents, at least, no one will disapprove of prudent spiritual reading for any Religious whatsoever. I say "prudent" spiritual reading advisedly. Everything

can be overdone, even as everything can be done in a wrong and harmful way. The best food, when taken in excess, will harm the body rather than profit it. In like manner an excess of spiritual reading, even aside of the fact that thereby a Sister may be neglecting her professional duties, will rather endanger than promote the welfare of the soul. Not every bodily food, good and salubrious as it may be in itself, is beneficial to every corporal constitution. Similarly a spiritual book may in itself be excellent, and yet not at all advisable to everyone as food for the soul.

*Hypochondriacs*

Books, for instance, that bring great benefit to normal minds might be deadly in their effects upon scrupulous persons. The latter are known to be like hypochondriacs who cannot read about any disease without fearing lest they have it: in like manner scrupulous people easily suspect themselves as being guilty of whatsoever distemper of the soul they may be reading a mention or description of. Instead of acquiring or increasing their peace of mind, therefore, which is or should be the proximate or remote purpose of all spiritual reading, they easily lose or decrease the little peace they still have, if they are not judicious and careful in

the choice of the books they read on the spiritual life.

*Medicine for the Soul*

A library in ancient Thebes had the inscription: "Medicine for the Soul." A great deal of good sense was condensed in those few words. The soul as well as the body has its maladies and distempers. Loneliness, discouragement, despondency, melancholy, jealousy, envy, inordinate ambition, misanthropy, pessimism are only a few of the many illnesses that can beset the soul and endanger its spiritual life, progress, and efficiency. None of them or similar diseases but can be cured by judicious reading. But the same spiritual medicine in the same doses cannot be prescribed for different subjects, even though they may be suffering from a like malady. The temperament of the subject must be considered before a recipe can be judiciously given.

The medicine for the soul in the form of spiritual reading can be either preventive or curative. Prevention is better and safer than cure, especially with reference to spiritual diseases. Next to the sacraments and prayer nothing protects the soul more efficiently against disorders than wise, consistent, and regular spiritual reading.

*Experience Teaches*

People who are moderate in their habits and guided by good sense, close observation, and wise reflection regarding their personal life soon discover what kind of food benefits and what kind harms them. In consequence they use the one and avoid the other. Religious, who have the gift of counsel and wisdom, soon make the same discovery regarding the food of their soul coming to them in the way of spiritual reading. They learn from experience what kind of reading furthers them more in the love of virtue and the practice of perfection than another, and they pursue it accordingly.

Some nuns do much better by reading biography, such as the lives of the saints, than if they read merely doctrinal spiritual books. Others again prefer the latter to the former. Not a few derive much profit from reading the revelations of saintly or pious persons which have the approbation of the Church. There are those also who feel most stimulated to spirituality by reading stories of a religious and pious trend. Whatever you have found to bring your soul substantial relief, succor, and stimulation in the way of spiritual reading you may abide by, even if others do not fall in with your taste and cannot understand how you can benefit by what you

read, provided it is not disapproved of by the Church or the statutes of your community.

*Good Taste Can Be Acquired*

While each Sister is privileged to follow her personal taste in the matter of spiritual reading, she will nevertheless be wise if she is aware of the psychological fact that good taste, also mental and spiritual taste, can be acquired and improved. She may be able to acquire a taste for better spiritual reading than she has been accustomed to. Contrariwise she can rid herself of a dislike for certain spiritual reading that will prove very profitable to her.

In the line of bodily food people are known to do this on a large scale. As soon as they learn from a good source that certain foods which have never attracted them, yea, which have positively repelled them, are very salutary for their system, they not only overcome the revulsion they feel for the foods in question, but they also create within themselves a strong appetite for them. The same can be done, with an equal amount of will power and determination, in the spiritual domain. Say a Sister, for example, feels not the least attraction to read the Bible in any fashion or form, neither the New Testament nor the

Old. The perusal of the gospel, or the life of Jesus Christ, her Spouse, has no charms for her whatever. In fact, she finds it dry, uninteresting, unappealing, and unsatisfying.

*Something Wrong With Her Taste*

Evidently there is something wrong with her taste. It needs to be corrected and improved. That a consecrated bride of the Lord should find no interest and charm in the official and detailed record of His wonderful life and His marvelous utterances, is not a normal, nor is it a tolerable, condition. If she has good sense, therefore, and more than a merely sentimental love of Jesus, she will train herself to read His life and teaching with reverent attention, devotion, and love.

Ere long—in the spiritual sphere, too, appetite comes with the eating—she will relish this reading more and derive greater profit from it than from any other spiritual book, and she will consider the day lost on which she does not read at least a part of this God-inspired volume, telling her again and again the sweetest story ever told.

*A Spiritual Diary*

To spiritual reading on the part of a God-fearing nun apply, too, the words of St. Paul: "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I

understood as a child, I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away the things of a child" (1 Cor., 13, 11). In her maturer years a Sister can afford to read more solid, substantial and energizing matter than when she was a mere girl. She does not neglect to assign a prominent place to the periodical perusal of her holy rule and the constitutions of her community in the program of her spiritual reading.

In case she keeps a spiritual diary—a practice which ascetical writers recommend highly to those who have the required talents and inclination for it—in which she notes carefully and more or less in detail the outstanding experiences of her spiritual life, her gleanings from ascetical books, lectures, conferences, and sermons, the re-reading of it at certain intervals, especially in the retreat, will prosper her materially.

*They Found the Book*

In regard to the reading of the holy rule and constitutions of the order, an instructive story comes to mind. Under the godly King Josias in the Old Testament "Helcias, the priest, found the book of the law of the Lord, by the hand of Moses. . . He read it before the king. And when he had heard the words of the law, he rent his garments. And he

commanded Helcias, . . . saying: Go and pray to the Lord for me, and for the remnant of Israel, and Juda, concerning all the words of this book, which is found. For the great wrath of the Lord hath fallen upon us, because our fathers have not kept the words of the Lord, to do all things that are written in this book" (2 Paral., 34, 14, *sqq.*). And immediately the pious king inaugurated a general reform of the entire people of God in keeping with the requirements of the law of the Lord found in the sacred book.

*Startled and Stung*

If all Religious carefully and conscientiously read their book of rules during the retreat or the book of their constitutions they would in many instances be startled and stung with remorse for having so long a time ignored certain points of the book as to forget they were matters of obligation to them at all. One of the chief purposes of the community retreat is to have the entire assembly rehearse again their book of laws, and strive to bring their individual conduct as well as the life of the entire community in line with its prescriptions. Wherever this is thoroughly done at each annual retreat the religious spirit of the order remains vigorous and inspiring, and the order never deviates

materially from the spirit and practice of its founder.

*Calories and Vitamins*

Nowadays, more than ever before in the recorded history of mankind, people closely and scrupulously investigate the properties of food as to its alimentary and hygienic properties. Never did ordinary people speak and worry so much about the presence or absence of calories, vitamins, proteins, and other factors of bodily nutrition as they do today. And some say that women, especially educated and cultured women, are more in evidence in this regard than men. Particularly those ladies who are alarmed at their accumulation of avoirdupois in jeopardy of their slender beauty of form can discourse for hours on the calory and vitamin contents of the various foods.

Nuns, save in rare cases, are not addicted to this weakness, if it is a weakness. Some nuns might do well if they paid a little more attention to the food contents of the nourishment they take. It would operate in the interest of their health and general well being.

*Reading Must Be Judicious*

But as we are here engaged in the discussion not of the properties of the material

food we use, but of the qualities of the spiritual aliment we consume in the way of good reading, Sisters will understand that with reference to it, too, it is wise to measure carefully the spiritually nutritive content of a book, magazine, or article, in order to obtain the particular light, guidance, and help one may stand especially in need of.

A person inclined to inordinate self-confidence, conceit, presumption, and pride will require a different book than one who is a victim of undue timidity, diffidence, pusillanimity, and despondency. The same holds good respecting other opposite traits of character. Jesus spoke in an altogether different tone to the haughty and self-sufficient Pharisees than He did to the humble and self-effacing penitents. While one Sister for her advancement in perfection may need an increase in spiritual calories and vitamins of a given kind, another may have to steer clear of the same calories and vitamins for the same purpose. A nun's spiritual food is the indicator of her spiritual life. In general the saying is true: Tell me what you read and I shall tell you what manner of a nun you are.

*The Game of Bridge*

As a rule the same secular ladies who are most interested in thinking and speaking of

calories and vitamins in material foodstuffs, not so much in view of an increase as a decrease of their bodily shape, are also great addicts of the popular card game called bridge. Among good players it is no doubt a fascinating game and, as long as one does not indulge in it to excess, it is an altogether innocent and honorable pastime. Unless their rule or statutes forbid card playing—no recreation, even in convents, can be more harmless, and few can be more sociable, companionable, refreshing, and exhilarating than a good and sensible game of cards—Sisters will not go amiss by comprising an occasional, or even daily, game of bridge in their domestic recreational program.

*Jars and Jolts*

It will help them overlook and forget the little mutual jars, jolts, discrepancies, and displeasures that are unavoidable in community life, no matter who makes up the community. If you had the privilege—to imagine an impossible but, I believe, a clearly illustrative case—of placing into one convent six of the saintliest nuns who ever lived, say, St. Teresa of Jesus, St. Teresa of the Child Jesus, St. Clare of Assisi, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Rose of Lima, and St. Frances de Chantal, their daily life in the convent would

not run on with absolute smoothness, unclouded peace, and undisturbed composure.

The infirmity of human nature — we are considering the saints in question not in their lives of glory, but in their mortal lives— would be sure to assert itself somehow, and certain disagreeable occurrences of a domestic nature would not fail to ensue both to try and to increase the virtue and holiness of the parties concerned. Hence you must not be surprised or shocked if in your modest convent home, with its more or less ordinary human denizens, events take place that are not reminiscent of paradise before the fall.

*A Revealer of Character*

A good game of cards, like bridge, is also a fruitful revealer of character. No Sister can be truly interested in the game without consciously or unconsciously disclosing her lovable and unlovable, together with her strong and weak points, of character. The game also gives the players occasion to exercise several virtues rather strenuously at times, such as patience, humility, resignation, charity, forbearance, and forgiveness of injuries.

Moreover, such a card game, with its continuous periodical variations of ups and

downs, good luck and bad luck, neither of them remaining consistent and reliable for any length of time, is a true picture of human life in general and of convent life in particular.

Today a Sister holds good hands and rather controls the game of cloistral life: tomorrow another may get all the trumps and bring her down to defeat. A good loser in a card game is usually a good loser in real life. Vice versa, one who shows what they call a yellow streak when she loses at cards is usually what they also call a poor sport in the game of life.

*A Fool He Was*

Some time ago the papers carried a despatch telling of a man who had bad luck at a card game. Getting a bad hand at a critical point of the game, he rose from the table, went into an adjoining room, drew a revolver, and killed himself. What a fool he was, to take his life for a mere game of cards. Had he but waited a turn or two, he no doubt would have got a good hand.

This tragic incident reminded me of the folly of certain unfortunate Religious who, because, as they say, they are getting a raw deal from their order, contract the ugly and deadening habit of chronic pessimism and

misanthropy. Some, even, on the spur of the moment, and in a childish fit of disappointment and petulance, leave the convent and dismiss the habit forever.

*Wait for Another Deal*

What aggravates and provokes them is usually, when properly gauged and sifted, not more important than a casual and ephemeral development at a game of cards. And if they only gave themselves time, maybe the very next deal in convent appointments might change their ill fortune into good fortune.

Then, too, it is worthy of note that at a card game what a player often looks upon as a miserable hand turns out to be, because of the general distribution of the cards, the best hand of all. This observation may also be made in religious life. A nun receives what she considers a most wretched appointment; but ere long she realizes that, all things considered, none better and more desirable could have been accorded her.

*He Usually Won*

As a student in the preparatory seminary, I knew a Father Provincial who was a good parchesi player. He ordinarily won, and was therefore rather fond of the game. Before

each game he stipulated that the loser had to offer up a rosary for the Poor Souls. This may not be an advisable arrangement for Sisters, as they have enough prayers to say as it is, and the less clever or lucky players might be overburdened with rosary debts.

But the question that is uppermost in the minds of the readers at this moment doubtless is: How and why has the author drifted of a sudden, in so earnest and spiritual a book as this purports to be, and which is intended to be read during retreat, from a discourse on spiritual reading into a discussion and a rather favorable advocacy of the merits of the worldly and light amusement of bridge?

*Why Bridge?*

The reason I mention bridge in this chapter on spiritual reading is a notice I read in a daily paper some time ago which stated that a person who knows how to play bridge will never be lonely in old age, much less before the advent of old age. What is here predicted in favor of learning bridge—some say the same of the game of solitaire, but probably with less reason—is altogether and without any reservation applicable to spiritual reading in regard to a nun. If she contracts the same love for spiritual reading and, with the

required moderation, pursues it as fondly and passionately as many secular ladies play bridge, she will never be lonely in her old age when she is incapacitated and hindered from taking part in active work.

*They Want To Meet Them*

When Sisters hear of men and women who are highly and extraordinarily spiritual, and who have proved their title to the reputation they possess by manifesting wonderful powers of wise and advantageous spiritual guidance on a large scale and in divers circumstances, either by personal interview or by writing books or letters, they often entertain, and sometimes express, the wish that they might have the opportunity to meet and listen to the spiritual discourses and elucubrations of such men or women. They are convinced it would be a distinct and great spiritual treat which would leave an indelible impression upon their mind and perhaps influence their lives for good in a substantial and permanent manner.

*Meet Them In the Library*

Sisters can procure this treat for themselves whenever the desire seizes them by going to the library and picking out the book of their favorite writer of the past or present

time and imbibing the very best he or she had or has to give. It is true, reading an author's book is not the same as is meeting and speaking or listening to him or her in person. But, oftener than not, the reading of an author's book is more productive of good in the reader than would be a personal interview.

In his book an author gives the best he has to bestow, after careful sifting and mature deliberation. In a personal talk he would run a risk of bestowing only his mediocre wares because of the mood he was in, the handicap of the time, place, or person interviewing him, or a certain hurry and consequent indeliberateness that were victimizing him.

*Distance Lends Enchantment*

Besides, while some authors of the past and present, whose writings ravish and inspire their readers, might measure up to this impression of their votaries through their personal appearance, carriage, and speech, the majority of them would be likely rather to lose than to gain in prestige by a personal acquaintance of them on the part of their readers and admirers. In his book an author naturally discovers himself directly or indirectly in his most favorable appearance.

In many instances he would have considerable difficulty in maintaining this appearance at its best for any length of time in personal contact and direct converse with his followers. For this reason a nun who has access to a tolerably good spiritual library need not envy those who have come or now come in personal touch with spiritual men or women of high and unusual calibre. By reading their books she can at once get into the most favorable relations with as many as she cares to be influenced and prospered by. She can change from one author to another, prefer one to another, quit one or all at will without fearing to hurt anyone's feelings.

*Two Categories*

Here it may be worth while to recall to mind the Latin proverb: "Timeo lectorem unius libri": "I fear the reader of one book." The original meaning of this adage is that a man who concentrates on one book, studies it closely, understands it correctly, and assimilates it fully is a master of the subject which the book handles, and in so far he challenges respect and credence; much more so than one who reads a number of books hurriedly and superficially and digests and keeps nothing of all he reads. These two categories of readers of spiritual books are

also represented among Sisters. A nun who sticks to one good book until she appropriates everything it has to offer her, profits much more by her reading than the Sister who reads ever so many spiritual books in a precipitate and shallow manner. Even as there are those who read well written story books without acquiring any of their literary style, or improving their language at all, so there are those who read excellent spiritual books without the least advancement in virtue and goodness.

*She Grows Narrow-Minded*

The aforesaid proverb, however, may also be interpreted in the sense, that the person who through a misguided attachment to one solitary book reads it only to the exclusion of all other books is to be feared, too, as one who is narrow-minded and whose spiritual vision is very much circumscribed. A certain variety of good spiritual books is to be recommended to everyone who desires a degree of versatility and comprehensiveness in spiritual knowledge. Even as the body gradually tires of the same food, no matter how good and appetizing it is: so the soul also craves for a diversity of food in the phase of spiritual reading.

*He Liked Peanuts*

In Texas, several years ago, a man set out to prove by his own experience that the peanut contained all the nourishment the human body required. He ate nothing but peanuts for forty-eight days, when he died. His nourishment had been too limited and insufficient. The illustration is not perfectly to the point, I know; yet it may bring home the truth that with reference to spiritual nutrition, too, in the way of spiritual reading a similar mistake may be made.

In the retreat the spiritual reading, both public and private, is to serve the threefold purpose mentioned in connection with other exercises of the retreat. First, it is to atone for the neglect you have been guilty of in the line of spiritual reading since your last retreat. Maybe you did not read a single spiritual book or pamphlet throughout the entire year. In addition to that you either evaded the public spiritual reading for the flimsiest reason or no reason at all or, if you had to be present at it in the body, you paid no attention to it, but allowed your mind to rove freely into all kinds of extraneous subjects while it was going on.

*Public Spiritual Reading*

Or, maybe, being superior, you were guilty of culpably omitting the salutary exercise of public spiritual reading in the house under your charge, thus depriving the Sisters of a prolific source of religious profit, besides begetting in them a depreciation of the value of spiritual reading: in which case your responsibility and your duty of atonement are the greater.

Here a remark may be in order to the effect that the value of public spiritual reading to a community is for a great part dependent upon the judicious choice of books which are used for it. In this regard the superior has room for the display of good taste, correct judgment, and common sense.

*A Wise Investment*

As regards private spiritual reading among the Sisters it can be materially nursed and promoted by the superior, in keeping with the financial ability of the community, through the furnishing of good and interesting books that appeal to the Sisters. While a number of spiritual books, written many years ago, will never lose their worth and timeliness, and may never be superseded in their class, and should therefore be much handled by the nuns: modern spiritual books

of recognized merit, written in the language of our day, for people of our age, should not be made little of and overlooked. Whatever money the community judiciously invests in good books for the Sisters will not fail to bring excellent returns.

*A Mere Make-Believe*

You say that you like spiritual reading and wanted to pursue it methodically and consistently, convinced as you were of its importance and relative necessity: but that you were so engrossed with your vocational duties that you had neither time nor inclination to devote to it in the past year. This screen or pretext based on the lack of time, when analyzed without prejudice, is usually a mere make-believe and self-delusion, if it really succeeds in deluding the one who makes it; in which case he or she is to be pitied. We ordinarily find time for things which we really like and want to do. We learn to economize our time in order to have a sufficient amount of it left for our favorite hobby, study, or pastime. Hence, if you had really been fond of and, in a good sense, passionately devoted to spiritual reading, you would have arranged your daily work and program in a way as to gain ample time for it.

*An Efficiency Expert*

Perhaps the aid of what they today call an efficiency expert would have helped you to a good surplus of time after all your allotted work was done and thus aided you towards considerable leisure for easy and deliberate spiritual reading; namely of the kind that, for being absorbed with attention and understanding, seeps deep into the mind and impregnates it with the fertile germs of virtue and holiness.

When Sisters are told, for instance, that if they finish work, which habitually takes them an entire day to do, in a half a day they may use the other half day for a pleasant excursion on which they are very much bent, they can usually be counted on to fulfill the condition with expeditiousness and alacrity. This merely proves what one can do under the pressure and urgency of an engaging stimulant.

*Her Pet Pastime*

The Sister, therefore, who is as eager for spiritual reading as some Sisters are for interesting and pleasurable excursions—and no one surely begrudges our hard-working and close-living Sisters such periodical recreations and diversions in keeping with their

holy rule—never complains of not finding time to devote to her pet pastime or, if you want to call it so in the modern slang, her cloistral weakness.

But if you really have too much work as to be able to devote a quarter of an hour daily to private spiritual reading you must resign a part of it, if the amount of work is of your own choosing, as it is in many cases; or you must ask your superiors in all modesty and submissiveness kindly to relieve you of a part of it so you can attend properly to your own spiritual needs. What St. Francis of Assisi enjoins upon his brethren in his rule, viz., that they should work, but always in such a manner as not to lose the spirit of prayer, applies proportionately and relatively also to spiritual reading which is one of the best supply sources of good and productive prayers.

*Lack of System*

The Sisters who regularly exempt themselves from spiritual reading because of too much work, not seldom lose a great deal of valuable time by the lack of system in their work and by a want of preparation for their work. If they outlined and planned it carefully beforehand they would dispatch it

quicker and better. Other Sisters who do undoubtedly more and better work than they always find plenty of time for spiritual reading.

There are Sisters who make themselves and try to make others believe they are very busy while they are actually loafing and absolutely non-productive. They waste ever so much time running to and fro without knowing what they are about, when they could do much better in remaining stationary and doing what they have been told to do.

*Telephone Calls*

Other Sisters there are who expend much good time, that could profitably be used for reading, on idle and not always edifying telephone calls, parlor visists, or correspondence. At any rate it will go hard to find a single saint who was so busy with any kind of work that he regularly used it as a pretense to forego spiritual reading.

The person who wants to be at her best in any department of life must not be completely and incessantly absorbed by her work for others, but she must always manage to keep some time daily in reserve for her own self-improvement, her necessary leisure and relaxation, when she can come to,

as it were, get her bearings, replenish her stock of spiritual and nervous energy, re-establish her poise and composure of mind, and recover the correct perspective of her life and work. To a nun this is particularly imperative. She achieves it to a large extent by good spiritual reading.

It is by no means of uncommon occurrence that the very Sisters who complain most of not having any time for good spiritual reading find the most time of all the nuns to employ in the pursuit of such reading as does them more harm than good, and is more disedifying than edifying, not only to the other and perhaps younger Sisters, but also to secular people.

*Sensational and Malodorous*

The Sisters referred to have time to read secular magazines of not the best reputation; portions of the daily papers that are sensational and malodorous and not at all fit to be read by a consecrated bride of Jesus; novels, sickly stories of love and romance, silly and erotic comic strips or common detective stories that persons who have a desire to be given credit for good sense would not like to be caught with by those whose opinion they esteem; and at times even such books as are on the Index of Forbidden Books, of which

the particular reader may not be aware, although she may have a suspicion of it, and should therefore ascertain the status of the book before reading it; or perhaps she knows it is a forbidden book but reads it nonetheless in spite of the Church's prohibition, or possibly even because of it. This is a very rare case, thank God, but it is hardly an altogether imaginary one.

*Listening to the Radio*

Nowadays much precious time is unquestionably wasted, even in convents, through listening to the radio. No sensible person ignores the great educative, entertaining, and recreational value the radio possesses. It is a wonderful asset in a home, also a cloistral home, for many reasons. Hence, wherever the rule does not disallow its presence and use in cloisters, it is not only perfectly admissible but in many instances it may be quite desirable.

On the other hand, since everything can be abused, no one will deny that it is possible to squander much good time on the radio. While an amount of high-class material in the way of instructive talks and classical music is broadcast through the air, most of the commonly preferred productions are of

a light and frivolous nature, if not silly and morbidly sentimental in words as well as melody.

*Mental Relaxation*

While even the enjoyment of these may be only for mental relaxation and therefore not necessarily reprehensible, the danger is nigh of protracting the indulgence in such relaxation to an excessive length and, consequently, of wasting valuable time on mere and useless folly. Hardly anything can come over the radio the listening to which will be as profitable to the heart and mind as the easy, leisurely, yet careful reading of a good spiritual book.

At all events, you can now erase whatever guilt you have contracted with regard to your duty of spiritual reading since your last spiritual exercises by pursuing it fervently and devoutly during these days of your retreat. And, as in the case of the Apostles, nothing will likely make the retreat appear shorter to you, by enlivening your interest in the lectures, increasing your fervor in prayer, and rendering silence sweet to you, than this wholesome practice of spiritual reading. Choose a book that appeals to you and try to make its contents your own for your advancement in piety and sanctity before the retreat is over.

*Waiting for Dinner*

St. Ignatius of Loyola owed his conversion to God, as is well known, to the perusal of the Lives of the Saints, which he initially read to while away the time when he was bed-ridden and waiting for a wound to heal. St. John Columbini owed his sanctity to the same casual-looking start. Coming home for dinner one day, he had to wait a while before it was ready. His wife handed him a copy of the Lives of the Saints to read while he was waiting. It was enough to turn his thoughts towards the high degree of holiness which he at once began to attain. The same effects which good spiritual reading exerted in these and countless other instances that could be quoted from the history of holy people of the past and present time it will also produce in you if you attend to it in the right manner. If you are already started on the way of holiness, as you certainly should be by this time, it will do much to maintain you on it steadfastly and advance you on it rapidly.

*Twenty-Two Years*

If here I may be permitted to add a personal experience of my own of the effect of good biography upon the reader, I will say that, perusing the Life and Letters of Cardinal Newman some time ago—and this ought to

be a comfort to the Sisters who are authors as it was to me—I was not a little encouraged when I read in the letters of the illustrious convert that one of his books required eighteen years, and another twenty-two years, before they really got anything like recognition from the public.

Even after he had become an international literary celebrity because of his matchless genius in the manipulation of the English language, he ceased publishing anything for several years. When asked the reason of this by a close friend, Newman replied that, since his published books were not selling at the time, he was not inclined to clutter bookshelves with additional fruits of his pen.

*A Real Torture*

Of two celebrated secular writers, Robert Stephenson, and an American writer who is still living, autobiographical declarations state that it was a real torture to them, and they literally had to force themselves, to start writing the genial stories that seemed to flow spontaneously and joyfully from their pens. For a mediocre writer, who may be suffering from a similar handicap, such discoveries are decidedly soothing and heartening. The same is true regarding the

difficulties we find in our religious life when in our spiritual reading we come across experiences similar to our own which were virtuously borne and gloriously exploited unto holiness by heroic men and women.

*A Slow Worker*

Years ago, when I was in the novitiate, we were reading in public the treatise on religious perfection by Rodriguez. He relates the story of a Jesuit Father who, in spite of being very intent upon achieving perfection, was twenty-two years in attaining it. Being young and inexperienced at the time, I was convinced that said Father was a long time in becoming perfect. It seemed to me then, if one really desired to grow perfect, it should be quite possible for him to do so, say within a week.

Since then, of course, I have changed my mind on this and other subjects of the spiritual life. Now I find the above quoted example to be a source of consolation, besides being an object of admiration, rather than something to be thought lightly of. The same solace is afforded the readers of the Imitation of Christ which says that if we uproot one fault each year we do well towards the accomplishment of perfection.

*Twenty-Two Hours*

To return to Cardinal Newman, whose writings are known to rank among the first and best spiritual books in the English language, he reports in one of his letters that on one occasion he worked on a book twenty-two consecutive hours without a respite. It was while he was writing his masterly "Apologia". He was then about sixty-four years old. This episode conveys to us three truths: first, that young or middle-aged people must not be too prone to sneer at old or senescent people as though their time for enduring and effective labor was past; and second, that old or aging people should not be too ready to use mere age as a shield for their indolence and love of ease and comfort.

The third truth it brings home to us is that genius, far from dispensing its beneficiary from hard and incessant labor, rather spurs him on to it; and that substantial success in any worthwhile thing is never achieved without laborious application, unflinching concentration, and invincible grit. The same lessons, in the attainment of holiness, are given us by the perusal of any biography of a canonized or a non-canonized saint.

*A Speedometer Test*

Furthermore, during the retreat you can test yourself again as to your capacity in reference to spiritual reading. Riding along a prominent highway yesterday I noticed for the first time a speedometer testing course of a mile on it. The mile is mathematically measured and marked so that the correctness of the speedometer's registration can be gauged by it. Motorists are grateful for the convenience, for they want to know whether and in how far their speedometer is reliable.

So, too, in a retreat a nun has the opportunity of testing the various qualities of her soul with regard to her prospects of salvation. And good Sisters are thankful for the opportunity of making this important test in every feature of their spiritual make-up. They pay particular attention to their faculty of applying themselves to spiritual reading to see whether they are capable of pursuing it with the persistency and absorption its importance in the spiritual life calls for.

*Snatches of Time*

Finally, by applying yourself virtuously to spiritual reading, public as well as private, in the course of the entire retreat you will again recover your taste for spiritual reading

if you have lost it, or you will confirm yourself in it if you have retained it. In both cases you will have a distinct profit to your credit. Cardinal Wiseman says regarding his immortal book "Fabiola" that he wrote it for a great part in the hurried snatches of time which he could reclaim from his multifarious and very pressing duties. If he, in the face of his important engagements succeeded in writing, in the manner indicated, a book that spurs countless readers on to a better knowledge of, and a greater love for their holy faith, you, who cannot claim to be as busy with other duties as he was, ought surely to find it possible to snatch about fifteen minutes of each day to occupy yourself with the perusal of a good and stimulating spiritual book. If the retreat induces you to do this much until your next retreat you will likely come to your next retreat with a larger volume of holiness than you brought to this one.

*The Examination of Conscience*

Since spiritual reading, when properly done, inclines the reader strongly to wholesome self-inspection, a word on the examination of conscience during the retreat will not be inappropriate here. Everything in

the retreat is intended to stimulate and abet a healthy examination of conscience. In regard to it also it is advisable to recall the three purposes of the various retreat exercises, viz.: atonement for the past; a test for the present; provisions for the future.

It may sound crude, but there is considerable truth in the saying that the salubrious practice of the daily examens of conscience, followed by an act of perfect love and contrition, are like the act of disposing of the foul material that accumulates in the garbage can continuously. If the can is not periodically emptied and cleaned its accumulation becomes a distinct menace to the health of the inhabitants of the house.

Similarly the spiritual garbage gathering in our souls day for day in the way of sinful thoughts, feelings, desires, words, and deeds needs to be disposed of periodically once or twice a day to forestall an atmosphere of corruption endangering the life of the soul. While it lasts, cleaning house is irksome and unpleasant; but it brings a feeling of relief, comfort, contentment and joy when it is over. The daily slogan of a nun earnestly striving after perfection must be: "Behold, I make all things new" (Apoc., 21, 5).

# LECTURE XVI.

## The Manifestation of the Paraclete

*"They were all filled with the Holy Ghost"* (Acts, 2, 4).

It is significant that when Jesus promised to send the Holy Ghost to His disciples and ordered them to go in retreat until they would receive Him, He gave them no specific indication of how long they would have to wait for the advent of the Holy Spirit. They were merely told they should not depart from Jerusalem until they were "baptized with the Holy Ghost". Jesus added, however: "not many days hence" (Acts, 1, 5). Here again He wanted the apostles to surrender themselves entirely to His sweet pleasure and abide His own time.

### *They Had Better Sense*

Tiring under the strain, the disciples, when the fifth and sixth day passed without any sign of the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus in their behalf, might have grown impatient, saying: "The Master has evidently forgotten about us. By this time, eager as we are to receive Him, the Holy Spirit should have come to us. What is the idea, anyway, of

keeping us in this suspense? We must be about our business of making a living. Hence we will go home and see what develops." Had they spoken and acted thus, they would likely have never been baptized with the Holy Ghost at all. Because they had better sense, however, and waited patiently for the accomplishment of the Lord's promise, their persevering confidence was richly rewarded on the tenth day, when they not only received the Holy Spirit, but were filled with His presence and grace.

*The Value of Patience*

Here we have an emphatic illustration of the words of Jesus: "In your patience you shall possess your souls" (Luke, 21, 19). The reason a number of Religious lose their souls by forfeiting their holy vocation is often the want of patience in the various phases of religious life, especially with reference to the hearing of their prayers and the provision of help for them from on high. If they only gave God time, speaking reverently, or, rather, if they were only disciplined to adjust themselves to God's time instead of insisting that their own fixing of time had to be followed in every instance, they would fare very well in the possession of their souls, the attainment of peace, and the con-

quest of holiness in their convent life. "The patient man," says the Bible, "is better than the valiant" (Proverbs, 16, 32).

*One Becomes a Saint, the Other —?*

The explanation why of two Religious who entered the convent at the same time one becomes a saint, whereas the other lags far behind in virtue, or even falls on the wayside entirely, is often found in the practice of genuine patience on the part of the one, and the neglect of it on the part of the other.

The one waits for the Lord's timely help in the change of conditions that are hard and appear intolerable; in the removal of occasions of sin that are beyond her own contrôl; in the amelioration of her own spiritual condition that tends to worry and depress her; and in reconciling her in general to cloistral life and its divers appurtenances and accessories, especially in the form of the human infirmities and consequent displeasures and annoyances that adhere to it.

*An Ultimatum to the Lord*

The other, however, practically gives the Lord an ultimatum, inasmuch as she threatens that, if certain conditions with which she is displeased are not remedied at once or before the date set by her; if the help she

has asked for in regard to particular difficulties and discomfitures that harass and perplex her is not forthcoming within the term she has assigned; or if the lauded sweetness of religious life, which for her is the yoke of Christ, and the lightness of its burden, will not be sensibly and emotionally evident to her within the period she has decreed for it: she will renounce all hope of prospective help from on high, and lose all her confidence in the promises of the Lord, and take things in her own hand by carving out her own career in keeping with her own sweet pleasure and her personal propensities.

By this she means, alas, that she will turn her back to the convent and, in more instances than one, she will at the same time lose her holy faith, her God, and her soul. Because she would not have patience and wait upon the Lord with resignation and enduring expectancy, she could not possess her soul in contentment and safety.

*The Hebrew Instinct*

They tell a story of a Jew who had been taught by a Catholic that God hears every prayer. Meeting his informer later on, the Jew told him that he did not find the statement correct. He had prayed and his prayer was not heard. The Catholic asked him what

he had prayed for. He replied: "For a million dollars." "No wonder your prayer was not heard," said the Catholic; "you asked for too much." "Well," retorted the Jew rather irreverently, "why doesn't the Lord make me an offer?"

A Sister does not easily err by asking for too much in regard to her eternal welfare, but more than one nun fails by not having the patience in waiting upon God's own time and manner in granting her requests for her soul's relief.

*Spiritual Aridity*

In a minor and, thank God, in a far less degree, we observe the same phenomenon with reference to the holy retreat. One Sister makes a much better, a more peaceful, delicious, and fruitful retreat than another merely because she has a greater store of patience in waiting for the advent of the Holy Spirit. If, without any conscious fault of hers, she is troubled with spiritual aridity and vexed with emotional numbness, she humbly waits for the dew of heavenly grace to moisten her soul unto a fertility of aspiration, desire, and resolution to such a degree that it will also stir the dormant appetitive emotions unto flights of ardent attachment and devotion to God.

She sets no time for this awakening; nor does she insist on its realization; neither does she dictate the degree and measure of it: but she leaves the entire process to the Holy Ghost with unqualified trust and unadulterated conformity to His divine will. Hence her success in every retreat and her reasons for self-congratulation on the obvious manner in which Jesus manifests His predilection for her.

*When a Spouse Is Jealous*

Even as a jealous spouse who, by a cold, formal, and forbidding manner, has been punishing his bride for her disloyalty or inattention to him, when he suddenly relents and turns towards her again in tenderness and love, is likely to try to indemnify her for all the sufferings his jealousy had inflicted upon her: so Jesus seems to act in a mystical and spiritual way with reference to the nun whom for some reason or other He has been holding in the thralls of spiritual darkness, indevotion, and apathy regarding piety and religion in general.

*He Called Her Mary*

Often before His death Jesus no doubt had called the penitent Magdalen by her name of "Mary"; otherwise she would not have recognized the sound of it so readily and

unmistakably when Jesus called her thus after His resurrection. But the sound of her name spoken by Jesus, after she had not seen or heard Him for three consecutive days, was immensely sweeter than it had ever been before because of the preceding silence and coldness of the death of Jesus.

Such is the experience of the faithful, trustful, and patient nun when, after a hard siege of apparent coldness, indifference, and aversion on the part of her divine Lover, He suddenly turns to her again in the holy retreat or, for that matter, not until it is well over, to assure her again of the vividness, depth, and ardor of His love for her, and to inflame her heart with corresponding love, tenderness, and warmth. It always pays to wait on the Lord.

*He Kissed the Pope's Foot*

In Rome, years ago, I knew a priest of considerable prominence who told me, in a tone of unmistakable elation, that he was going to have a private audience with Pope Benedict XV. on the following day. When I saw him the next evening I asked him, by way of starting the conversation, if he kissed the Holy Father's foot. "Yes," he said in a tone bespeaking a degree of disappointment, "as soon as I entered the

door of his private study, he extended his foot towards me." Because of his position he had hoped he would not be asked to perform the ceremony of obeisance, consisting in kissing the precious stone on the slipper of His Holiness, as a token of homage and entire surrender to the authority of the Vicar of Christ. Not long after the same priest received signal honors and promotions from the Holy See.

In a similar way a nun in retreat may imagine she is not receiving a very gracious reception from the Holy Ghost. He appears to treat her with cold formality and distant ceremony. If she does not waver in her trust in His love and goodness, He will not be long in showering His sweetest and best favors upon her.

Hitherto we have been considering the points of resemblance between the retreat of the apostles in the cenacle and its effects upon them and the annual retreat of the Sisters. It will prove profitable, no doubt, if we now reflect upon one or the other difference between the two retreats and their manner of operation.

### *A Mighty Wind*

The advent of the Holy Ghost in the cenacle is recorded thus: "And suddenly there

came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming: and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues, as it were of fire: and it sat upon every one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost: and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak" (Acts, 2, 2-4).

When Sisters are in retreat there is no external manifestation of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them. There is no noise of a mighty wind; nor is there the vision of fiery tongues, sitting upon each one of the nuns. But the interior visitation of the Holy Ghost is not less because of the want of the accompaniment of outward demonstration. The exterior display in the cenacle was not so much for the benefit of the apostles, who needed no outward sign of their being filled with the Holy Ghost, as for the benefit of the people on the outside, who needed to be attracted and interested in what was going on in order to listen to the preaching of the apostles and obtain salvation as a result.

*He Grips the Soul*

In the retreat of Sisters the coming of the Holy Ghost in His fullness to a soul is usually not sudden but gradual. He grips, pene-

trates, and vitalizes the soul more and more as the retreat proceeds. Nor does He necessarily manifest Himself as being the Holy Spirit while He is enlightening a nun's mind and taking possession of her heart.

Here He likes to do as Jesus did after His resurrection. He casually, as it seemed, joined the two disciples who were on their way to Emmaus. Although their heart was burning within them, whilst He spoke in the way and opened to them the Scriptures (Luke, 24, 32), they did not recognize Jesus, in spite of having been with Him so often and much before, until "He took bread and blessed and brake and gave to them. And their eyes were opened: and they knew Him" *ib.*, 30, 31).

*She Does Not Recognize Him*

Similarly the Holy Ghost may be operating in the soul of a Sister variously, inflaming her heart, illuminating her mind, and stirring her will, before she is quite aware that it is He Who is the invisible and silent power that is sweetly and gradually transforming her. Moreover, as Jesus, risen from the dead, used various disguises, such as that of a gardener, a pilgrim, or a fisherman, that He might not overwhelm His followers by too sudden an apparition, so the Holy Spirit in retreats is

not averse to similar concealments of His divine personality in order to exert His influence gently upon the soul of the nun in retreat.

She may be believing it is the personality of the retreat-master, or his lectures, or guidance, to which she is beholden for the wonderful transmutation that is taking place in her soul; or she may ascribe it to the influence of the book that is being read in public or which she is reading privately during the retreat; or she may give credit for the change that is going on within her to the good example of a fellow Sister who seems to have a mysterious fascination and magnetism for her in regard to personal betterment and the love of moral goodness: but in reality these and similar factors of spiritual improvement and advancement are nothing else but loving disguises of the Spirit of Jesus Who has numberless open and hidden ways of inveigling souls into the sweet snares of His power and the delicious meshes of His love.

### "*The Spirit Breatheth Where He Will*"

The apostles were all filled with the Holy Ghost at the same time and in the identical manner. In Sisters' retreats this is usually not the case. As has been mentioned in

previous parts of this book the Holy Spirit comes to various Sisters at various times, in divers ways, and different degrees. "The Spirit breatheth where He will and thou hearest His voice: but thou knowest not whence He cometh and whither He goeth" (John, 3, 8).

But whatever may be the accidental differences between the retreat of the apostles and that of the Sisters, the effect of the retreat upon the souls of the beneficiaries, if it is genuine, must be the same in the case of nuns as it was in regard to the apostles, who "spoke with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak". "And . . . the multitude . . . were confounded in mind, because that every man heard them speak in his own tongue. And they were all amazed and wondered, saying: Behold, are not all these that speak, Galileans? And how have we heard, every man our own tongue wherein we were born?" (Acts, 2, 6-8.)

*The Universal Language*

After their retreat the apostles, by speaking but one and the same language, were miraculously understood by the people of various tongues as though they were speaking the particular tongue of each people present. The Sisters are expected to repeat

this wondrous feat in a spiritual manner. They are to speak a language which everyone who comes in contact with them and under their influence in some degree or other, directly or indirectly, can readily understand, to whatever nationality or profession or class of people the individual in question may belong.

There is only one such language that is easily and unmistakably understandable by everyone, and tells all the people who come within the radius of it "the wonderful works of God". It, too, causes them to be astonished and wonder, "saying one to another: What meaneth this?" (Acts, 2, 11, 12.) This is the language of a good example which every Sister who is under the sway of the Spirit of God speaks instinctively and spontaneously, without much effort, as a rule, and with no admixture of affectation or a semblance of posing.

*Their Gifts Were Divers*

It is worthy of note, and not devoid of consolation, to reflect upon the fact, that the apostles spoke with divers tongues also in the sense that they by and by exerted a diversified influence for good in the mission fields to which they were gradually assigned

according to the individual gifts they had received from the Holy Spirit.

Even as He manifested a strong uniformity in His external descent upon them, as we considered above, so He doubtless allowed Himself as much variety in the interior effects which He produced in the soul of each apostle, qualifying the one to be conspicuous particularly in one virtue, while his companion would excel in another. Peter was to be prominent by his adamantine faith in Christ, Andrew was destined to be especially aglow with a burning love of the cross of Christ, while John was to be an outstanding example of the love of Christ.

*Power from on High*

In like manner the Holy Ghost practices uniformity in a Sisters' retreat by inoculating everyone of them who is in a responsive and receptive mood with His heavenly power. At the same time He pursues His love of variety by making this power assume a different phase and exert a varied influence in the case of the individual Sisters.

St. Paul gives us excellent instructions in this matter. The Sister who understands and heeds them makes a strong bid for interior peace and contentment in the convent. The

Apostle says: "Now there are diversities of graces, but the same Spirit. And there are diversities of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but the same God, Who worketh in all. And the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man unto profit. To one indeed, by the Spirit, is given the word of wisdom: and to another, the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit: to another, faith in the same Spirit: to another, the grace of healing in one Spirit: to another, the working of miracles: to another, prophecy: to another, the discerning of spirits: to another, diverse kinds of tongues: to another, interpretation of speeches. But all these things one and the same Spirit worketh, dividing to everyone according as He will" (1 Cor., 12, 4-11).

*Multiplicity and Variety*

This elaborate classification of the bountiful and marvelous operations of the Holy Spirit could be duplicated, as regards the gifts of the mind and heart that make for personal sanctification of the individual—St. Paul enumerates rather the more or less miraculous gifts that are bestowed not for the benefit of the recipient so much as for the welfare of others—in practically every retreat that is preached to nuns. They re-

ceive a startling multiplicity and variety of gifts, each one according to her capacity and in relation to her individual temperament and spiritual needs.

It would be a great and most inspiring revelation to the Sisters if at the end of each retreat it were publicly manifested by a proclamation of God just what particular grace each Sister received from the Holy Spirit, and in what degree and measure. Then, indeed, the cynics, some of whom are found even in the cloisters of nuns, who loudly declare the idleness and utter worthlessness of retreats, would be covered with shame and confusion and condemned to perpetual silence on their pet hobby of argumentation.

*The Fancied Proclamation*

We can imagine the fancied proclamation to read something after this tenor: "To Sister A., the appointed superior of a large and difficult mission, are given the qualities of wisdom, tact, and prudence; to Sister B., the superior of another ample and hard charge, the virtues of humility, disinterestedness, fairness, and impartiality; to Sister C., a superior similarly situated, the gift of a large and warm sympathy, truly motherly patience, forbearance, and consideration for

each individual Sister under her and for all of them together.

To Sister D. is imparted a great love of holy obedience and a grateful and affectionate reverence for her superiors; to Sister E., a remarkable fondness for the vow of poverty and a corresponding dread of superfluities and wastefulness. Sister F. has suddenly and definitely been delivered from an inordinate and highly dangerous attachment. Sister G. received the grace to make a good general confession which she should have made long ago, but which she feared she would never be able to make until she was on her deathbed, if she would summon courage enough to make it then.

*A Heroic Act*

Sister H. has finally dismissed forever from her heart a wilful aversion and vindictive feeling against a fellow nun which had retarded her progress in spirituality for a long time. By this one act of heroic and complete forgiveness she has gained as many merits, however, as she had forfeited through her previous protracted lack of charity.

Sister I. who, when the retreat began, was on the very verge of religious collapse, and strongly inclined to bid farewell to the cloister and everything it ever meant to her,

is now solidly confirmed in her holy vocation and irrevocably committed to the unceasing strife after perfection and holiness. Sister J., who was a victim to torturing scruples and haunting hallucinations, now enjoys calm of mind and peace of heart in a ravishing degree.

*Peace In Her Heart*

Thus the list would go on and on, comprising the various gifts the Holy Spirit is wont to dispense to the Sisters in a well-made retreat, not omitting a single one of them who makes the retreat in sincerity and with a willing and ready heart. Of every retreat the effect invariably is in keeping with the effect which the advent of Jesus, the retreat-master of retreat-masters, came upon this earth to produce, and which the angels announcing His birth declared, saying: "Glory to God in the highest: and on earth peace to men of good will" (Luke, 2, 14). Every nun of good will is entitled to depart from a retreat with peace in her heart. She will not envy others because they received graces different from hers in view of having received the grace that was best fitted for her own needs.

*They Began At Once*

The apostles began at once, no sooner their retreat was over, to disclose the aston-

ishing effects of it to themselves and others unto the glory of God. They did not put off actualizing the sentiments engendered in them during the retreat. The fullness of the Holy Ghost which possessed and swayed them did not allow them any procrastination in demonstrating what the retreat in the cenacle had done for them. Hence they all spoke in divers tongues immediately upon leaving the seclusion of their retreat.

The time for a nun to actualize the resolutions she made in the retreat is right after the retreat ends or, in a number of instances, even before it ends. The Sister who does not keep her retreat resolutions when they are still fresh upon her gives little promise of keeping them when the realization of their importance and necessity, and her willingness and eagerness to convert them into action have considerably waned, if they have not entirely vanished.

*A New Hat for an Old One*

At the beginning of a mission, just as I was to preach the sermon on Salvation, the pastor said he wanted to make several announcements. The last one he made after this manner: "Last Sunday a man came to this church with a perfectly new and good hat. When he left, there was an old and

worn hat in the place of his. We therefore request the man, who brought the old hat and carried away the new one, please to return the new one and get his old one back again."

This publication struck me as a queer introduction to my sermon on Salvation. Yet it could have served a purpose at that. For in a mission, as in a retreat, all we are about is to exchange the old for the new. St. Paul expresses this saying: "Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new paste, as you are unleavened. . . Therefore, let us feast, not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness: but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor., 5, 7, 8). "Put off, according to former conversation, the old man who is corrupted. . . And put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth" (Ephes., 4, 22, 24). If this transformation is taking place in a nun in a retreat the evidence of it will be visible at once.

*She Lost Her Teeth*

In the course of the aforesaid mission a lady came to the rectory to report that she had had the misfortune to lose a double set of artificial teeth that had just been

made for her by the dentist. She evidently desired a publication of it to be made in church. But the pastor did not acquiesce in her request. Neither has this part of the story any bearing on our retreat save as a harmless diversion of the mind. But if one insisted on deriving a moral lesson from it, she could reason thus, for instance: If the loss of replaceable teeth worry a person so acridly, how can one remain indifferent about losing her soul, for which there never will be a substitute?

*No More Mortal Sin*

Furthermore the apostles kept the resolutions of their retreat not only on the day on which it closed; or for the first week following it; or for a month or a year afterwards; but they observed them unto the end of their lives. As was noted in a previous part of this book, it is commonly held in the Church that not one of the apostles committed a mortal sin after the descent of the Holy Ghost upon them. This shows the abundance of grace they received from the Holy Ghost in their retreat, on the one hand; and, on the other, it indicates the wholeheartedness and loyalty of their cooperation with the grace they received.

*Confirmation*

The Sister who is and remains as faithful and constant in her response to the grace of God tendered her in the retreat as the apostles did is a candidate, too, for the greatest grace God can give anyone upon this earth, namely, the confirmation in His love. If she receives this favor, she will never again be separated from God through sin. In comparison with this divine bounty, which God loves to bestow upon the humble and lowly-minded, the little ones, as Jesus likes to call them, whether they are superiors or subjects, the highest dignities of the community and all the distinctions of the world and the grandest honors of men are like mere dust and ashes set over against imperishable glory and undying beatitude. In view of it the fortunate nun exclaims with St. Paul: "Furthermore, I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord: for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but as dung, that I may gain Christ" (Philipp., 3, 8).

*Petting and Necking*

In every line of work for God there are discouragements. A missionary has his, too, in the work he does. Preaching a mission

in a large parish I had given the special mission instruction to the young unmarried people of both sexes. After the sermon one of the young men rather pertly remarked: "Petting and necking will now go hard for two weeks." This was not much of a solace to the missioner.

It would be sad if a nun after the retreat would be justified in saying, for example: "For two weeks the cloistral silence will now be observed; the daily program of conventual exercises will be conscientiously followed; the required permissions will be duly applied for, etc. Not because of the retreat-master, but in the interest of their own souls Sisters display their firm will of keeping their retreat resolutions permanently.

*The Poor Missionary*

Because it is somehow related to the foregoing story I may here insert an incident occurring to me in a big city. A number of educated and apparently good Catholic young ladies, some of them school teachers, and all of them more or less in love, had listened to a mission sermon on courtship, love, etc., and discussed it warmly among themselves after the church services. When I asked one of them, who related these

facts to me, what they thought of the sermon, she replied: "We unanimously agreed that the missioner did not know what he was talking about."

The reason some nuns after the retreat do not discontinue certain questionable practices regarding the vow of poverty, or obedience, or chastity, or the virtue of prayer, or charity, is because they convince or try to convince themselves that, however well the retreat-master may have discoursed on their particular weakness, he did not know what he was talking about.

*The Prototype of Nuns*

Finally, the Sisters must derive immense consolation and encouragement from the soothing and inspiring reflection that, on Pentecost Day, in the cenacle, the person who received a greater fullness of the Holy Ghost than any of the apostles or all of the apostles taken together was a woman like themselves and the prototype of all nuns of all times: Our Blessed Lady, the Mother of Jesus.

If the Spirit of Jesus was so supremely partial to the first nun of Christendom all other good nuns, who aim in their way and measure to be faithful copies of Mary, have

reasons to hope that He will favor them in proportion. In this hope no good Sister has ever been disappointed, and none will ever be.

*A Question*

You may ask admiringly and lovingly: "How could our Blessed Mother, whom the angel declared to be full of grace at the incarnation, and to whom he promised that the Holy Ghost would overshadow her, be again filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Day, since she had lost none of the fullness she had received at her own conception and at the incarnation of her divine Son? What is already full cannot be filled again unless it loses its first fullness which, in regard to grace, we cannot conceive or predicate of Mary without blasphemy.

The answer to this question is, that the Spirit of Jesus, in view of her many and sublime merits in the passion and death of Jesus, increased immensely Mary's capacity for the reception of additional divine grace, thus rendering it possible to convey to her another plenitude of the Holy Ghost, vastly greater than the prior one.

If God's goodness runs over with reference to every creature who is in a mood to invite and receive it, why should it observe measure

or limits when there is question of showering it upon her who is the daughter of the eternal Father, the Mother of the divine Son, and the spouse of the Holy Ghost?

*The Secret of Her Power*

The entire reason of Mary's power in luring and receiving so immeasurable an abundance of the presence and power of the Holy Ghost is told briefly and comprehensively in her beautiful words to the angel: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to Thy word" (Luke, 1, 38). Happy the nun who learns well, takes to heart, and reduces to action this secret of Mary's charm which even God Himself could not resist, and who says not only in words, but by her whole conduct: "Lord, in this retreat I am but Thy handmaid. I am here to do Thy bidding; to anticipate Thy wishes; to comply with Thy every suggestion regarding my condition and behavior. Whatever, therefore, Thou desirest me to do, or to quit, or to go after: whatever the cost may be to me: Lord, with Thy grace I will yield to Thee unconditionally in everything." "Be it done to me according to Thy word."

When the retreat is over this Sister will be able, yea, compelled to exclaim with

Mary: "My soul doth magnify the Lord. And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. Because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid: for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me: and holy is His Name" (Luke, 1, 46-49).

# LECTURE XVII.

## New Year in the Religious Life

> "*With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that considereth in the heart*" (Jer., 12, 11).

Whenever the soul of a Religious becomes desolate, barren, and unresponsive to the spiritual influences of convent life the cause always is, outside of constitutionally abnormal cases, the lack of consideration, reflection, meditation, and self-inspection. To forestall, in the case of Religious, the curse of spiritual desolation and sterility, or to check it definitely if it has already appeared, the Church binds them to the yearly retreat. Owing to the environment and other circumstances of it they who take part in it can hardly avoid entering into themselves and considering "in the heart".

### *She Begins to Calculate*

The fact alone that the annual retreat represents to the Religious in a way the end of one, and the start of another, year in the spiritual life, is a strong monitor inclining the serious-minded Sister towards a reflective, meditative, and introspective mood. She

grows pensive and begins to calculate. She spontaneously wonders what the year that is ending has brought or taken from her, and what the year that is starting promises her, or threatens her with.

Happy she if, after weighing well and justly her various experiences, labors, and merits of the past year, and thanking God humbly and warmly for His grace that rendered them possible, she can say to herself in the spiritual domain what the rich man, whose land brought forth plenty of fruits, said to his soul: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years" (Luke, 12, 19); and if, for the term of the same year, she can repeat the words of St. Paul: "I have fought a good fight: . . . I have kept the faith" (2 Tim., 4, 7).

*Pressing Towards the Mark*

No doubt, with very few exceptions, every nun is able to do this at each annual retreat. This fact, however, far from begetting in these fortunate nuns a spirit of vanity and pride, but makes them say with greater emphasis: "We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which we ought to do" (Luke, 17, 10). And far from imitating the aforesaid rich man in saying to his soul: "Take thy rest!" (Luke, 12, 19) each one

of them rather says with St. Paul: "By the grace of God, I am what I am" (1 Cor., 15, 10). "Not as though I had already attained or were already perfect . . . I do not count myself to have apprehended. But one thing I do: Forgetting the things that are behind and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus" (Philipp., 3, 12-14).

*Experience Is the Best Teacher*

In the spiritual life as well as elsewhere experience is the best teacher. A good way, then, to learn how to conduct ourselves in the future is by justly gauging and wisely utilizing our experience of the past. We are pilgrims on this earth traveling continuously towards our eternal goal. Travellers have divers adventures and misadventures that teach them how to demean themselves in the portion of the road they still have to travel.

In our earthly sojourn we are writing our biography in the Book of Life. A close and sensible inspection into what we are writing in it or failing to write in it is very much in order during the annual retreat; in fact, it must be its foremost occupation.

In this brief life we are building the tower of our perfection and holiness. It must

interest us very materially how we are advancing with this one necessary structure.

As long as we are on this earth we are engaged in a spiritual warfare against the enemies of our soul. It must be of vital concern to us to know if, and how much, and why this campaign of all campaigns is progressing in our favor or disfavor.

*A Nun's Road to Heaven*

As to the road a Sister is traveling on her way to eternity, the first thing she must attend to is to make sure that she is still on the road she determined to follow when she entered the convent and professed her holy vows. It was the narrow and straight road of the close and faithful following of Jesus. It was the royal road of the cross. A nun can ascertain whether or not she is still on her chosen road by attending to the observance or non-observance, on her part, of the three vows of obedience, chastity, and poverty. If this observance is flourishing in her case, there is no doubt that she is still on the right road. If it has fallen into abeyance, it is certain she has got off the right road, whatever success she has or seems to have in other lines of religious endeavor or her professional work.

*A Fallen Hero*

In California, about two years ago, a very clever and popular football player became the laughing stock of the country through a serious inadvertence he was the victim of, in an important intersectional game, upon which the eyes of the whole nation were turned. Capturing the ball from the enemy he started on a sensational run. He got on, as he thought, wondrously, circumventing and evading the enemy's opposition at every turn with utmost adroitness and masterly strategy. He felt he had victory within his grasp, and that he was the hero of the day, conquering for himself an enviable niche in the hall of American football fame forever. But, alas, when he was finally halted by one of the men of his own team, he was made aware that all the while he had been running the wrong way and furthering with all his might the enemy's cause. His shame, disgrace, and remorse were in proportion to what he had fancied his fame, glory, and satisfaction would be.

*Football Games*

Football games come and go. Today a certain game creates a sensational and universal interest: tomorrow the memory of it is dimmed and obliterated by other games

that make a bid for the public's attention. Maybe, too, the adverse experience of the young man in question was a wholesome lesson to him regarding the more serious and worthwhile things of life, and was consequently a blessing in disguise. God loves to use reverses in transitory things to lure those whom He loves to fall in love with and ardently pursue the intransitory goods.

*She Dreams of Fame*

But it is unspeakably disastrous if a nun, oblivious of the substantial purpose for the attainment of which she entered Religion, namely her personal perfection and sanctification, imagines she is running fast and well: say because she is having such unprecedented success as a nurse, or a teacher, or a superior, or a builder, or an organizer, or a writer, or lecturer, or something similar in her profession; she dreams of fame and glory, contemporary as well as future, in consequence of her achievements; she is fully satisfied and positively delighted with herself: while all the while, through her vanity, pride, and self-gratification; and through her gross neglect of prayer, self-discipline, and other spiritual duties she is running in the wrong direction and playing into the hands of the enemy of her soul. Of the pagan philosophers

of old St. Augustine says that they took big strides but outside of the road that leads to salvation. It is not impossible for a nun to be beguiled by her self-love into taking similar apparently big, but in reality fatal, strides.

*She Was Concentrated*

A missionary Father was seated in a train some time ago when a very demure and noticeably reserved nun entered the car. After taking a seat she seemed to be altogether concentrated in her mind on something or other and lost to the world around her. Fortunately before the train started the conductor asked her where she was going. When she told him, he informed her that she was on the wrong train, and that the train she intended to take was on another track and just about due to leave.

He hurried her out of the train and, taking her by the arm, he escorted her in all haste to the train that was to take her to her destination. No sooner she had boarded it, the train started. It was a rather rude awakening for the nun at the time, absorbed as she was in her own thoughts. But no doubt she was grateful to the official for advising her betimes of her mistake.

*The Wrong Train*

In the spiritual life it not seldom happens that a Sister through carelessness and listlessness gets into the wrong train that threatens to carry her farther and farther away from her goal. She will be blessed if in the retreat, for instance, she is suddenly informed of her serious mistake and is helped to correct it ere it is too late.

Years ago, when I myself was little experienced in traveling, I had to go to Bloomington, Illinois, to preach a retreat to Sisters. I was to change trains in Indianapolis, Indiana. When I heard the train being called for Bloomington, I went through the gates and settled myself comfortably in the train. After the train had started and the conductor came to collect the tickets he told me I was on the wrong train. I was headed for Bloomington, Indiana, whereas my ticket read Bloomington, Illinois. Both trains were ready at the same hour. Hence the mistake.

I was not so fortunate as the Sister in the previous story. When I got back to the depot the train for Bloomington, Illinois, had already departed, and I had to wait for hours for the next one. Still, I got on time to preach the retreat according to schedule, since the mistake was discovered early enough.

*A Salutary Check*

In the spiritual life it happens, too, that a Religious starts in the wrong direction by taking liberties with the rule and her vows. As long as she discovers her error soon enough, the correction of it and its sinister effects is still possible. But if she lets it go on too long, there may be no remedy for its evil consequences. For this reason the annual retreat is a wise provision and a salutary check for all Religious. It gives them time and opportunity to reconnoitre their situation from every angle to find out whether it is altogether satisfactory or not, and to take corresponding measures on behalf of their immortal soul.

Since we are discoursing about trains, I may be excused for adding another adventure of mine in my traveling experience. I was riding on a transcontinental train from Portland, Oregon, to San Francisco in a Pullman car. I had taken breakfast in the diner and spent the morning and noon hours writing at a book I intended to publish. My grip was open, and I had my manuscripts spread on one of the little Pullman tables before me.

*Coffee and Sandwich*

When it got to be about two o'clock I felt I should like to have a slight refreshment.

I did not want to go into the diner for a cup of coffee and a sandwich, but waited until I could get it at a station. Soon the train stopped at a station. No long stop was scheduled on the time-table, but several of the passengers took their hats and alighted from the train to take a stroll on the platform. I asked the porter if there was a stop. He answered there was one of fifteen minutes.

I spied a restaurant across the way from the train and hurriedly made for it to get the said refreshment. I felt somewhat uneasy about the matter, but reasoning that the porter knew his business, I despatched my little lunch, and in about seven minutes I was back to the station. But the train was gone. The ticket agent told me there was no stop, and that the porter was wrong in what he told me. I asked him what I was to do. He said: "Take a taxi and catch the train."

*The Taxi-Driver*

When I looked for the taxi, it, too, was gone. I hastened into the town near by. I found the taxi, but not the driver. He soon was located also. I told him I wanted to catch the train that had left about ten minutes previously. He said he would do his best to catch it for me. Luckily the train took a circuitous route to the next station.

While we were driving along at great speed through the beautiful scenery of Oregon on good roads, the taxi driver said to me: "Traffic cops are policing this road against speeders. Will you stand the consequences if we are arrested?" I answered that I did not want to be arrested, but was bent on making the train at the next station, about thirty-three miles from where we had started. He rejoined that there was a county fair that day and that the policemen were all likely at the fair to keep order.

*Ten Dollars for a Sandwich*

Anyway, no traffic officer appeared to bother us. Then the driver told me of having been born in the old country of Catholic parents, of coming to America, and gradually losing his faith. He was a pleasant man and agreeable in the religious discussion which followed. Soon we got to the station ahead of the train, at which I rejoiced not a little. I asked what the taxi charges were. I was told I owed ten dollars. This was a big sum to pay for a cup of coffee and a sandwich, but the ride and adventure, and especially the annoyance I was spared were well worth the money.

Not to leave this story without its moral application, we may say that it brings home

to us the danger a Religious courts when she gets away from the life of the community to go her own way haphazardly and thoughtlessly. Had I stayed on the train and had my needs attended to there, I should have saved myself much worry and expense. I was lucky in faring as well in the end as I did.

*She Is Left Behind*

A Sister is safest spiritually when she conforms herself as much as possible in all things to the program of her convent. She is then borne along towards her final destination with ease, comfort, and safety. Once she wantonly or frivolously departs from community life and begins to shift for herself as best she may, she takes a big chance of being left behind while all her companions proceed nicely and securely towards heaven. And who knows if she will be fortunate enough to remedy her mistake betimes and catch up with her companions through a seasonable conversion and a thorough reformation?

Several years ago I travelled through the great desert from Gallup to Waterflow, New Mexico. It was towards the end of the rainy season and the roads, as much as was left of them, were well nigh impassable. The car another friar and I were using was put

out of service while trying to navigate through a swollen arroyo, or creek. I was fortunate in being taken on as a passenger by a government employee's car which, after considerable difficulty, brought me where I was bent on going to preach a retreat.

*Sunk in the Mud*

On the road, far in the desert, we met a party of four young automobilists, two men and two women. They were richly and daintily dressed and had a sumptuous high-powered car. It was sunk deep in the mud of the desert, however, and unable to move in any direction. The young people were walking about in the mud with their fine shoes, and were apparently in the thralls of disgust and despair. They were making the trip from coast to coast. When they started out in their youthful buoyancy and resourcefulness they doubtless did not calculate on any such misadventure overtaking them on their gay and jovial tour.

Yet, it mattered nothing whether they had counted on it or not: here they were apparently mud-fast beyond redemption. Still, redemption was in store for them. After a sufficient number of travellers gathered about the car, coming as they did slowly from both

directions, they united in one great effort to extricate the car from its muddy bed, and succeeded in setting it free to run again, to the great relief and delight of the juvenile party.

*A Thrilling Adventure*

This episode is illustrative of the sad fate of some young girls who, in the exuberance and utopianism of youth, enter the convent with dreams of unbroken peace and unalloyed happiness. They are bent on making the trip from earth to heaven as a sort of a thrilling spiritual adventure. Everything moves on nicely for a while, in the novitiate and a number of years following it, when of a sudden they find themselves miserably sunk in the mire of their human infirmity and fallibility. They had the misfortune to sin grossly against one of the vows or some other virtue.

Through repeated venial falls they had felt that the ground was slipping from under them; but they kept on hoping, against the stern admonitions of their conscience, that somehow they would keep themselves spiritually above ground and avoid a mortal fall. But now the sad foreboding of their conscience is verified. They have committed a mortal

sin. This is something they had never dreamed would occur to them in the convent, the nursery and sanctuary of holiness, no matter how long they would live in it, since it had never even happened to them when they lived in the sinful world.

*Depressed and Despondent*

Their adverse experience and shocking disillusionment tend to render them depressed and despondent. They are wondering if they will ever rise again from the slush of sin, and be able to proceed once more on the solid ground of virtue and sinlessness. Their fear, misgiving, and discouragement will be at once dispelled, however deplorable and hopeless their condition may appear, if they yield to God's grace and brace up by an implicit and unreserved faith in His infinite mercy and goodness.

In a retreat God has no sweeter and more delicious experience, to speak after a human fashion, than to extricate a soul from the marsh of her weakness and sinfulness. The deeper and more desperately she seems involved, the more will God enjoy disengaging her from her terrible plight. This is what God means when He tells us that His mercy is above all His works.

*Help Is Nigh*

The aforesaid party required the help of ever so many others to be delivered from their embarrassment. The soul in distress needs no one else for her complete relief and salvation than God and His representative, the priest in the holy sacrament of penance. If, knowing this, she fails to call on God in her misery, she will have no one but herself to blame for the ulterior catastrophical results of it. Where help is so nigh and easy of attainment it is criminal folly not to invoke it.

People who have made a long trip in an automobile with good fortune and splendid results like to tell of the many miles they travelled without a hitch of any kind, even without as much as a single tire puncture. Fortunate the Sister who, while she credits the achievement entirely to God's grace, can say that she fared similarly in the spiritual life since her last retreat, and spent the entire year without a single fully deliberate venial sin. The number of such Sisters is legion.

*No Serious Break-down*

Fortunate, too, are those numerous nuns who, while they ever and anon suffered light troubles in the form of wilful venial sins,

never met with a serious break-down through mortal sin. Fortunate, finally, are those Sisters who, after experiencing serious reversals and complete spiritual collapse through grievous sins, and possibly even through sacrileges, recovered themselves betimes with God's help and, through sincere and intense penance, rose higher in virtue and the love and grace of God than they ever had been before.

A friend of mine related with no little amusement a story in which he played a part. He was riding along an Indiana road in his coupe when he noticed a lady on the road who was having trouble with her car. From a sense of chivalry he stopped and asked her if he could be of assistance to her. She said she would be grateful for what help he could administer to her in her predicament. A tire had gone flat.

*Feminine Nerve*

She had no instruments to hoist up her car. He used his. When he looked for the trouble, he noticed a large puncture in the inner tube. He asked her if she had any patches and glue. She had none, but asked him kindly to use his. Soon, however, he noticed that the inner tube was all worn out and full of holes. He told her that she needed

a new inner tube. She said she had no spare inner tube in the car, and asked him if he could not give her one of his.

At this juncture, after the lady had mentioned, too, that her husband who accompanied her had gone to a near-by town to procure help, my friend hurriedly departed, for he feared, he added, that the next thing the lady would ask for would be his car. She had what men like to call the proverbial feminine nerve.

*The Spiritual Repair Shop*

At each annual retreat a Religious overhauls, using the word with due respect, the car of her soul. A general view of it may disclose no serious flaws. It may even appear to be in a grand and perfect condition. Still, a close and careful inspection may discover a considerable wear and tear on the car, requiring the repair of old parts and the installation of new ones, if the car is to give a satisfactory account of itself for another year of religious life.

Whatever a Sister finds wrong or dubious about the car of her soul, she must not be timid or shy about asking Jesus for all the readjustment or new parts she stands in need of. He called her to the retreat as to the spiritual repair shop of her soul. He Himself

is willing and eager to be the divine mechanic who will personally supervise and effect the restoration she requires. It is ever so much wiser and easier to forestall a wreck than to remedy the disastrous results of it.

*Safe and Sane Drivers*

Automobilists who fare well on a long trip usually owe their success and immunity from harm to a great extent to their own carefulness and caution. The same holds good in the spiritual life. The rules universally oberved by safe and sane drivers apply, too, in a figurative sense, to sensible Religious striving earnestly after perfection.

In the first place the autoist has his goal definitely fixed in his mind so that in his entire journey it is always before him controlling all his driving activities. He does not allow himself to be diverted from it through beautiful scenery or enticing roads that tempt him to forget his objective. In like manner the good nun always has the purpose for which she entered the convent clearly before her mind, and has it to sway all her thoughts, words, and deeds. She will not be induced to lose sight of it in order to enjoy a forbidden pastime or indulge a whim that is contrary to her vocation.

*Dangerous Day-Dreaming*

Statistics prove that a large number of automobile accidents are due to day-dreaming or momentary absent-mindedness. Perhaps the greater number of spiritual casualties in convents are ultimately reducible to the same cause. Sisters do not start out on set purpose to transgress a rule or violate a vow; but through their inadvertence and lack of concentration they are gradually inveigled into a state of mind that renders them capable of and prone to conventual irregularities.

*Beware of Speeding*

The autoist has a road map indicating closely and accurately the way he is to travel. The Sister has her holy rule as the always reliable map showing her the way to heaven. The careful automobilist avoids speeding. Outside of the other obvious dangers of speeding, an automobile that may be in a condition to run twenty or thirty thousand miles if moderately handled, will be almost out of commission after it has been used in a speed race, say, of five hundred miles. In like manner an indiscreet Sister, not to mention other perils of immoderation in her work, in a few months can use up the mental and corporal energy that with wise economy

might have lasted her for many years. The prudent nun eschews excess in everything. The thoughtful driver keeps to his side of the road and allows the other drivers all the space they are entitled to. The considerate Sister attends to her own business and accords to her companions all the latitude that is legitimate in the convent.

*Obey the Signals*

The wise autoist obeys the signals. When he sees a red light he knows there is danger in not paying attention to it. The wise nun attends scrupulously to the signals flashed in her interest by her conscience. As soon as it flashes red, or indicates there is danger in a certain friendship she has contracted, or in a correspondence she is pursuing, or in visits she is receiving or paying, whether in reference to a fellow Sister or a person outside of the community, or in some other practice or neglect she is guilty of: she does not argue with the signal of her conscience, but yields to its bidding at once.

Nothing makes more for real and permanent safety in the spiritual life than this ready and constant responsiveness to the danger signals. The reason why one nun of a clothing class perseveres and becomes a saint, while another of the same class defaults

and loses her vocation, although both live in the same environment and are similarly tempted in manner, degree, and measure, usually is: the former adverts to and obeys the danger signals from the start, whereas the latter either pays no attention to the signals or wantonly disobeys them. The wilful inattention to a single danger signal is sufficient to cause a woeful death to an auto-driver. The voluntary disregard of a solitary spiritual danger signal may hurl a Religious into eternal perdition.

*False Signals*

The local signal systems for autoists at times get out of order and function falsely and unreliably. They have to be periodically adjusted. In Sisters, too, the signaling faculty may grow disordered and untrustworthy. In other words, the conscience may become colored or discolored through the sinister influence of self-love and the power of the predominant passion.

Then, too, after a nun has often acted in a manner contrary to the voice of her conscience, and thereby benumbed it or put it to sleep, or made it acquiesce in what she dictated to it—some say that women can make their conscience more subservient to their wishes than men can—: her conscience

no longer registers correctly and is what theologians call a culpably false conscience. This is by no means to be trusted and followed, but must be immediately inspected and corrected. There is no better time to do this than the holy retreat. And there are likely very few consciences that do not require some adjustment one way or the other.

*Scrupulosity Is Misleading*

Not all consciences lose their justness through laxity. A number of consciences, of Sisters as well as of others, become unbalanced and more or less untrustworthy through the other excess of scrupulosity. Whatever the nun, afflicted with this mental or spiritual malady, can do to right her conscience and bring it back to a normal mode of signaling danger in the spiritual life, she must not hesitate to undertake at once.

Here I may be given leave to remark that in my book, "Back to God," mention of which is made at the end of this volume, I discourse rather elaborately and in detail on the not infrequent distemper of scrupulosity. The Sisters desiring information on it for themselves or others may derive profit from the perusal of the book.

*Our Autobiography*

Another task that awaits us in the period of the retreat is the inspection of our spiritual books, or of our last year's contribution to the Book of Life which God keeps regarding everyone of us. Spiritual writers counsel us to keep a diary in which we carefully jot down our daily victories and defeats, in order thereby to be continuously aware of our spiritual status. Not all Sisters pursue this practice consistently. Some have not the inclination or the gift to follow so precise and constant a method of self-investigation. Many, however, cultivate it to their signal profit and advancement in spirituality.

Be this as it may, God keeps a very accurate and complete diary of each of our lives in His Book of Life or, relatively, His Book of Death. Here, again, it would be a source of keen gratification to some Sisters, and of a crushing disappointment to others, if God allowed the aggregation of Sisters in the retreat to take a glimpse into His Book of Life or Book of Death and see the diaries of all the Sisters for the past year.

*A Shriek of Surprise*

They would see the percentage of conquests and falls of every nun in the community. No doubt many a shriek of surprise and, rela-

tively, of disillusionment would be heard from the various participants in the retreat. Sister A. would exclaim, for instance: "I did not expect so high a note in poverty, but I thought my humility note would be much better than it is. It is a disgrace, pure and simple, and I am thoroughly ashamed of it."

Sister B. would declare: "I wonder why so much was taken off from my obedience. Did the irreverent and disparaging remarks I made about my superior bring this shameful thing about, or was it my lack of punctuality and regularity at the community exercises?" Sister C. would say: "In the exercise of my office as superior I have the lowest note of all the superiors in the community. I wonder what caused it. Perhaps it was my selfish insistence on my authority and dignity in season and out of season; or my abominable partiality and pet cult; or my tendency to play the role of a mean detective in regard to the Sisters whereby I irritated them and instigated them to rebellion against the very authority I wanted to uphold."

*A Heavy Discount*

Sister D. would sigh: "I really did not expect that a certain sentimental and amorous relation I was nursing with a person of my

own or the other sex would discount my chastity percentage so heavily. I have never felt so abashed as I do now." And other Sisters would have occasion to make similar remarks respecting their percentages in other virtues. God does not vouchsafe us this insight into His Book of Life or Book of Death save indirectly, namely by means of our own conscience. Defective as this source of information is, if we utilize it uprightly, it will give us a lead to lucrative self-knowledge and lasting self-correction.

*The Erasure of Ugly Blots*

The pupil who gets a very adverse and ignominious report on this earth can never erase it. Once it is duly entered into the official book, it remains as it is. He may do better later on, and redeem himself completely, but his onetime sinister report will always stand out against him. Not so as to the report God has of us in His momentous book. No matter how strongly her annual spiritual report in God's book may tell against a certain Sister she can erase it at once and forever by a single tear of perfect contrition and the will to confess her sins with humility and compunction of heart. And this record, once erased, will never be revived or used in her disfavor again.

No season is more favorable than the holy retreat for the erasure of the ugly blots that your life's story may contain in God's book; and in none have you a better opportunity to render beautiful this your life's story which will be exhibited to all the world on the last day. Even as the steward in our Lord's parable (Luke, 16, 1 *sqq.*) reduced the bills of the debtors of his master from a hundred barrels of oil unto fifty, for example: so God gives us the power to discount entirely, with one sweep of our heart's true sorrow and love, all the bills that God holds against us.

*Summer School Notes*

Sisters who are fortunate in getting good notes in the summer school, for example, like to ask their companions what kind of notes they got, in order to make a comparison. But if they themselves got very poor notes they usually make no reference to the fact and even avoid asking the other Sisters about their percentages so that they will not be asked regarding their own. In consequence the community as such may never become aware of their ill-success.

On earth a nun can hide her meagre and disgraceful spiritual record and even make the impression that she is faring rather well in the spiritual life and is standing high with

God while the contrary may be the case. She may be one of those to whom our Lord, through her conscience, has sent and is sending the warning: "Be mindful therefore from whence thou art fallen: and do penance and do the first works. Or else I come to thee and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou do penance" (Apoc., 2, 5).

*An Annihilating Exposure*

In eternity, however, there will be no way for a disloyal nun to hide her shameful report, in case she dies in sin. On the Last Day God will flash it in flaming letters of lurid shame before all the world so impressively that its memory will remain vivid and shocking for all eternity in all those that see it. It is the part of a wise nun, therefore, to forestall the unspeakable confusion of this annihilating exposure by doing penance and to blot out, by the tears of wholesouled contrition, "the handwriting of the decree" (Coloss., 2, 14) that is against her. If she does this and remains faithful to grace until her death, one of her chief joys in heaven will result from the glorious report of her holy life proclaimed by God on judgment day and remembered by all the saints and angels of heaven unto her glory forever.

Every now and then the papers report the sad case of a trusted bookkeeper and treasurer who defaulted and defrauded his firm of large sums of money over a considerable period of time. He succeeded in covering his theft by the clever manipulation of the books in which even the auditors did not discover any discrepancy in their annual inspection of the books. Finally, however, the theft is discovered and the culprit is hailed before court and sent to the penitentiary.

*False Entries*

There are Religious who make false entries into their spiritual books. They succeed in making themselves believe, for instance, that certain violations of poverty, which they would never approve of or condone were others in similar circumstances guilty of them, are entirely legitimate in their case and need not be animadverted on in their examination of conscience; or, dependently upon their ruling passion, there may be question of irregularities against charity, obedience, or chastity which they handle in the same manner. Instead of placing them in glaring red ink on the debit side of their spiritual ledger, where they obviously belong, they place them on the credit side.

They do it so long and so habitually that soon they are no longer aware they had to fight with their conscience in the first place to make the wrong entry. They are deceiving themselves, and may be deceiving their confessor and their fellow Sisters and others who admire them for the virtues they believe they observe in them: but they are not deceiving Almighty God, Who will soon be the final and inexorably just auditor of their spiritual books.

*A Tremendous Deficit*

What a shock it will be to them in judgment when of a sudden they are made to see the tremendous spiritual deficit staring them in the face. To prevent any such ordeal in her regard the conscientious nun is careful at each retreat to audit her own books with the eye of God, as it were, and completely divested of inordinate self-love and self-delusion. She fully believes in, and practically acts in accord with, the words of St. Paul: "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (1 Cor., 11, 31).

Moreover, in her annual retreat the salvation-eager Sister feels it incumbent upon herself to inspect the building of spiritual perfection which she had a mind to erect when she became a Religious. She is one of those

to whom our Savior referred when He said: "Which of you, having a mind to build a tower, doth not first sit down and reckon the charges that are necessary, whether he have wherewithal to finish it: lest, after he hath laid the foundation and is not able to finish it, all that see it begin to mock him, saying: This man began to build and was not able to finish?" (Luke, 14, 29.)

*A New Motherhouse*

Persons who are building are usually very much interested in the edifice they are bent on erecting. When a new motherhouse is to be built, for instance, the superior who is responsible for the building is all attention and concern regarding it. It usually threatens to become quite an obsession with her. It aims at controlling all her thoughts not only in her waking but also in her sleeping moments. It likes to monopolize her conversation and become the only topic on which she cares to speak and the solitary one on which she can wax eloquent.

She is interested not only in the daily general progress of the building but also in every detail of it as to the material that is used and the cost that is involved. She insists on every point of the specifications being faithfully carried out. She herself inspects

the growing building day for day, and has a number of other Sisters to look it over with her in order that no flaw will creep into the structure through any fault of hers.

*She Enjoys It*

What is more, she usually enjoys the care and worry the building causes her and, whenever something turns up to annoy or discourage her, she remembers what the building will mean to the community and, who knows, to herself as a monument of her activity and efficiency, recalling her favorably to the Sisters for years to come. Thus she buoys up her drooping spirits and fans into a new flame her lagging alacrity for and flagging interest in the enterprise she has undertaken.

What peeves and irritates her most is if the work on the building does not go on, either for lack of material, or because of a strike of the laborers, or for want of money, or some other reason. And if, after the foundation was built and a part of the first story was added, this cessation of work would continue for years and years, she could hardly help growing completely disheartened and regretting she ever undertook to build at all. The sneers and sarcastic remarks of

various people and even of some of the Sisters about her starting to build but not being able to finish would cut her into her very soul and make life's burden lie heavy upon her, indeed.

*The Edifice of Sanctity*

A nun in retreat will not find it difficult to apply this illustration and other points in connection with it which her own imagination will easily supply to the case of her own spiritual edifice of holiness. She should be even more interested in it than the aforesaid Sister is interested in the erection of a new motherhouse, since for her the building of her structure of perfection means immensely more than the building of a material house can ever mean to any Sister. Whatever motherhouse a Sister may build is at most destined to stand but a limited number of years, whereas the house of a nun's perfection is appointed to last forever. Hence it deserves much more care, attention, and sacrifice not only as to its general outlines but also as to every detail affecting it.

*What a Structure!*

In what condition, then, do you now find this edifice of your religious perfection? After

all these years are you still at the foundation or only at the first story when the structures of your companions, some of whom started to build long after you, are almost completed and perfect? Has work and progress ceased on your building for months or perhaps for years? Instead of adding to your edifice from year to year are you perhaps allowing what you previously built to fall into decay and gradually crumble away?

How would you feel if God, in this retreat, would reveal the condition of your spiritual building to all the Sisters? Would you have reasons to be humbly and gratefully elated and intensely gratified, or would you have cause to "say to the mountains: Fall upon us! And to the hills: Cover us!" (Luke, 23, 30)?

*No One Likes Mockery*

Our Lord in His reference to this building of personal salvation lays particular stress on the element of mockery that awaits the one whose building is begun but fails of accomplishment. No one likes mockery. It crushes the heart of its victim. It is bad enough if it lasts but a short time. It is inexpressibly unbearable when it threatens to last forever and, as it were, to gain in momentum with the ages of eternity.

A number of our American city parishes that promise themselves a prosperous future begin the erection of a prospective magnificent church with the erection of a basement which is roofed and made to serve as a church until sufficient funds are available to proceed with the contemplated edifice.

*In the Basement*

It not seldom happens that the basement, instead of serving as a church for five or ten years, as had been initially planned, is used for twenty or thirty years, not without many uncomplimentary and sneering remarks of the passers-by and others who may be interested in the structure one way or another.

In the retreat the question from you to you is in order: Am I still spiritually in the basement of religious perfection after pretending to be laboring at the structure of this perfection for twenty, thirty or more years? Is it not time that I bestir myself to put on the superstructure while it is yet day, and before the night comes when no one can work? This the more, when I consider the beautiful edifices of religious holiness built by a number of my companions, some of whom began to build many years after me. What graces, advantages, and helps have they which I lack?

*The Boom Collapsed*

I recall, when I was a student in Rome thirty years ago, the melancholy impression made upon me by a number of large unfinished structures erected in the Eternal City at an immense expense about twenty-five years previously during a real estate boom which collapsed and doomed the buildings to remain incomplete and a subject of mockery unto many. They looked the sadder because of the contrast they offered to the sumptuous new buildings that were finished. I have noticed a similar condition in parts of our country which had been the victims of a meteoric boom.

Who knows, if God made the revelation intimated above, and manifested to the assembly of nuns the condition of each one's spiritual edifice, a similar sight among some very splendid buildings might be offered to the Sisters. If you have to admit that in this disclosure your building would be nothing to brag about, it is a hint from on high that you should set about putting it in such a condition that you will be able to glory in it; but, of course, in the Lord.

*A Strong Feminine Ambition*

In a previous chapter of this book we considered the strong natural tendency of woman

towards ambition and rivalry with other members of her sex. In the world this ambition of woman shows itself very markedly in regard to homes or mansions. A woman wants to have a home at least as good as that of her neighbors or relatives and, if possible, she likes to have hers to be superior to theirs in location, appearance, equipment, and comfort. If she succeeds in actualizing this desire she is happy.

The same ambition in a much higher degree of intensity and persistency should animate every nun with reference to her spiritual mansion. The earthly mansions in which secular ladies are so interested and of which they are often so very proud have a way of growing antiquated rather soon. They come to be out of date and as a result they begin to displease their owners as much as they at first delighted them. At the best their owners will not inhabit them long. Either the houses fall into ruins or the owners are carried out of them forever as corpses. That is always the way of mundane dwellings, be they magnificent palaces or unpretentious huts.

*This Edifice Will Last*

But, as was said before, the spiritual edifice a Sister now builds for herself will last

forever and ever. Hence it deserves to challenge all her interest and to inflame to the utmost her ambition and spirit of rivalry with her fellow Sisters. She should be determined that not one of them will have a grander, or even as grand a mansion as hers in heaven. St. Paul exhorts to this kind of rivalry when he says: "Be zealous for the better gifts" (1 Cor., 12, 31).

The same apostle gives his views pregnantly and incisively regarding the matter we are discussing when he says: "You are God's building. According to the grace of God that is given to me, as a wise architect, I have laid the foundation: and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation no man can lay, but that which is laid: which is Christ Jesus. Now, if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble: every man's work shall be manifest. For the day of the Lord shall declare it, because it shall be revealed in fire. And the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide, which he had built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work burn, he shall suffer loss" (1 Cor., 3, 9-15).

*Hay and Stubble*

Some Sisters use nothing but gold, silver, and precious stones in their buildings. In the buildings of other nuns combustible material, such as wood, hay and stubble, predominates. The former never act but with a pure intention to please God in all things, and with much ardor and intensity of love, whereas the latter are often actuated by a motive of self-love, vainglory, and inordinate ambition, and usually act indifferently, listlessly, and torpidly.

Jesus publicly tells the nuns in retreat, so to speak: "In My Father's house there are many mansions" (John, 14, 2). He advises them that the mansions of the elect will be varied in the degree of their beauty and charm. He wants to stimulate the Sisters towards seeing to it that their own mansion in heaven will be something to be proud of, in a good sense, even there. We have reasons to believe that the members of the same community will have their mansions close together in heaven, so that a comparison between them will naturally suggest itself.

*Subdivisions in Heaven*

Speaking with due reverence, we may say that in heaven each religious community will have its own subdivision, according to

its relative merit; and in the subdivision of her community each Sister will have a mansion corresponding precisely with her personal merit. There the assignments are made not through favor, caprice, or patronage, but in keeping with God's infinite justice. In these respective subdivisions the words of Jesus will be verified: "Many that are first shall be last: and the last shall be first" (Matt., 19, 30).

It behoves you, therefore, now to gird yourself for this contest of all contests among the Sisters, so that when the decision is made your mansion will stand out with particular preeminence and enviable splendor. To achieve this you must above all bear in mind the words of the divine builder, Jesus Christ, our Lord: "Who thinkest thou is the greater in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus calling unto Him a little child, set him in the midst of them, and said: Amen I say to you, unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt., 18, 1-4).

*You Are Your Own Architect*

While God is the supreme architect of all the celestial mansions, every nun is His assistant architect for her particular mansion.

She can devise and execute the ornamental details of the palace she wants to inhabit in heaven. Even as secular ladies, when they are casting about to choose a mansion for themselves, usually fix their eyes on what they consider a model mansion saying, for example: "I want a house like this or that one on the hill or terrace," so nuns do well in choosing a definite heavenly mansion as the pattern for theirs, and saying, for instance: "I want my house to be like that of St. Teresa of the Child Jesus, or St. Scholastica, or St. Vincent de Paul, or St. Francis of Assisi, or St. Dominic, or St. Ignatius," etc.

After you have picked your model, lose no time in copying it. "The great day of the Lord is near: it is near and exceeding swift" (Sophon., 1, 14). St. Anthony's mansion in heaven is not a particle brighter today, seven hundred years after his death, than it was the moment he took possession of it. "Therefore, whilst we have time, let us work good" (Galat., 6, 10). "For we know, if our earthly house of this habitation be dissolved, that we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in heaven" (2 Cor., 5, 1).

*The Great Campaign*

Our Savior, finally, compares our quest of salvation to a warfare, saying: "What

king, about to go to make war against another king, doth not first sit down and think whether he be able, with ten thousand, to meet him that, with twenty thousand, cometh against him?" (Luke, 14, 31). What kind of adversaries we must do battle against St. Paul tells us in the words: "For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood: but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places. Therefore, take unto you the armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day and to stand in all things perfect" (Ephes., 6, 12, 13).

*Shrewd and Expert Strategists*

Our enemies are shrewd and expert strategists in their manner of warfare. They are unscrupulous in the choice and employment of their methods. But they will never prevail over us as long as we remember, and act as though we remember, the words of St. Paul: "If God be for us, who is against us?" (Rom., 8, 31.) But God helps those who help themselves.

In the annual retreat a good and wise nun, therefore, reconnoiters carefully her position as to the conquest of salvation against the enemies of her soul. She has a

record of the spiritual victories she has achieved and of the defeats she has suffered. She knows the why and wherefore of each. By her past experiences of the great campaign she has learned how to conduct herself in her future encounters.

*A Respite Between Battles*

The retreat being a sort of a respite between big battles, she is careful to provide herself abundantly with the spiritual ammunition and maintenance she will stand particularly in need of when the conflict begins afresh. She takes no chances. She does not trust to mere luck. She has her plans carefully laid and all the provisions closely made to meet and vanquish the enemy whatever may be his method of attack.

In material warfare one battle often completely undoes one of the parties so it cannot rally again. But in spiritual warfare, no matter how ill a Sister has fared in a certain encounter, if she comes to the retreat she can completely recover from whatsoever defeat, and arm herself unto a glorious victory in the campaign that is ahead; so that when the end of the conflict comes she can say with St. Paul: "I have fought a good fight. . . As to the rest, there

is laid up for me a crown of justice which the Lord the just judge will render to me in that day" (2 Tim., 4, 7, 8).

*Summing Up*

Summing up the four points meditated upon in this lecture, as being closely associated with a retreat in as far as it is the end of one and the beginning of another year in her religious life, a Sister who is making retreat must derive much consolation from this rather sad but, for her, grateful reflection. Considering nuns by and large, the whole world over, she says within herself:

"On the road to heaven more than one nun in the past year has entirely gone astray and is now on the road to perdition. They have not the grace, as I have, to make a retreat and ascertain the correct directions to salvation. A number of nuns in the last twelve months had their names stricken from God's Book of Life. They have not the opportunity of a retreat to re-enter their names in this Book of books by a sincere conversion.

"Not a few nuns in the year that has just elapsed witnessed the complete collapse of the spiritual edifice they had been erecting for years and years. They are not accorded the bounty of a retreat to restore their

fallen edifices to their pristine beauty and solidity. Since last year's retreat nuns upon nuns have been defeated ingloriously in the warfare with their spiritual enemies, succumbing and surrendering to them in a way they had never considered possible in their better years of religious life. Not all of them have the advantage of a retreat to reverse their defeats and convert them into splendid victories by a humble, penitent, and wholehearted conversion."

In view of her fortunate and privileged condition she cannot but be moved to the utmost gratitude and love towards God and exclaim glowingly: "The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed: because His commiserations have not failed" (Lament., 3, 22). "The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever" (Ps. 88, 2).

# LECTURE XVIII.

## Death Comes to the Nun

> "*For to me, to live is Christ: and to die is gain*" (Philipp., 1, 21).

The best way to learn how to live is to learn how to die. Many years ago St. Augustine advised everyone who desired to live right and well to take death for his teacher, saying: "Sit mors pro doctore." An ancient Latin adage says: "Mors magistra veritatis": "Death is the teacher of truth." Death shows everything in its true light. It tears away the mask of disguise and the tinsel of mere show to exhibit things according to their real, and not imaginary, nature, and in keeping with their objective, and not merely pretended, value.

### *Death, the Teacher*

Since our purpose in making retreat is no other than to learn thoroughly how to institute our religious life correctly and profitably, we must have the great, reliable, and successful teacher of it, death, continually before us during the entire course of the retreat. Once pupils lose sight of their teacher and

disengage themselves from his or her influence their learning at once suffers.

In the light of death's stern and unvarnished teaching preferments, honors, dignities, degrees, popularity, and fame take on a far less bright, engaging, and enchanting hue than they have, even for many Religious, during life. And trials, tribulations, persecutions, disappointments, demotions, unpopularity, apparent mediocrity, inconspicuousness, littleness, and failure in the eyes of others often assume a more attractive, captivating and desirable appearance than they possessed in life, even for a number of nuns.

*A Different Rating*

Laxity of conduct as well as excessive scrupulosity will receive an entirely different rating when they are confronted with death than they received in life from their subjects. So will, for instance, the gratification of the spirit of revenge for injuries received and, relatively, the spirit of forgiveness of all injuries for the love of Christ. Verily, death is a forceful, incisive, apodictic, comprehensive, and a perfectly reliable teacher for the nun who hearkens to his lessons with a receptive mind, a docile heart, and a ready will.

We read in the lives of a number of great saints that they always had a skull or death's

head before them on their table or desk. This was nothing else than an indication and a reminder that death was their continuous teacher whose lessons were being incessantly conveyed to them no matter what they were doing, saying, writing, thinking, or planning. Without the aid of a realistic skull we can and must look upon death in the same light always. Particularly in the time of the holy retreat, however, we must say to ourselves very emphatically: "Sit mors pro doctore!" "Let death be my teacher!"

*A Course in the Art of Dying*

The retreat, then, is an eight day course in the art of dying in the Lord. It is, to use another metaphor, a dress rehearsal of our death. You know what a dress rehearsal is and purports to do. When a stage-play is to be produced the rehearsals start a considerable period before the play is to be acted. At first they are more or less general and superficial. The closer the day of production approaches, the more intense and careful the director has the rehearsals to be. The last rehearsal before the play is usually the so-called dress rehearsal.

The actors wear the costumes and the stage is fitted out with all the parapharnalia of the play, and it is acted as though it were being

produced in reality before a public audience. In this rehearsal the director is close and rigid in his attention to and criticism of the players. He allows no fault of speech, gesture, pose, or action to pass unnoticed and uncensured. He insists that the bungling or fumbling actor eliminate his mistakes, and he has him to repeat the correct version until he can be relied upon to deliver it successfully.

"That will never do," he will exclaim, for instance. "If you are going to act thus, you will disgrace yourself forever and your name will always be a byword of ridicule and obloquy in the community as long as you live. Correct this fault at once and definitely."

*A Dress Rehearsal of Your Death*

The retreat must be just such a dress rehearsal of your death. You are going to act it in your mind as though you were actually dying. This rehearsal will not be an idle day-dream in which you picture yourself as dying the death of a saint while the nuns are kneeling about your bed in mute admiration and veneration, saying: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Ps. 115, 14). Such a procedure, besides being a mere loss of time, would beget or foster vanity and self-delusion. By turning the retreat into a dress rehearsal of your

death you strive to put yourself into that frame of mind, that condition of conscience, and that temper of soul in which you want to be when you die.

*This Must Stop*

If, therefore, you notice something in your spiritual self that would be ruinous or, at least, detrimental to you in judgment: for instance, a feeling of unforgiveness; an inordinate attachment; an unrighted sacrilegious confession or Communion; a practice that is in disharmony with holy poverty; a sentiment of pride, rebelliousness, or insubordination; a weakness to be unjustly partial to one, and unduly depreciative of another, subject; a want of zeal and of cooperation with and for the community: you will no longer tolerate these or similar weaknesses and irregularities, which will either jeopardize your fate in death, or at least diminish materially your splendor in judgment; but you will say peremptorily: "This must stop; that fault must be corrected once for all; I must acquire this or that missing virtue at once; briefly, I want to be immediately ready to appear before my Judge." This is the dress rehearsal of death which is the pervading spirit and the key or dominant note of every good retreat.

*The Most Joyous Event*

Does this mean that in consequence the retreat will be a gloomy, sad, and melancholy period, affected and penetrated by the coldness, clamminess, and dreariness of death? By no means. Rather the contrary will be the case. Because the thought of death is its dominant note the retreat will necessarily be cheering, bracing, and exhilarating. For a good nun and a true bride of Christ no thought is sweeter and more soothing than that of her own demise. There is no event which she desires more ardently and welcomes more joyfully than the occurrence of her own death.

"For we know," she says with St. Paul, "if our earthly house of this habitation be dissolved, that we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in heaven. For in this also we groan, desiring to be clothed upon with our habitation that is from heaven . . . For we also, who are in this tabernacle, do groan, being burthened; because we would not be unclothed, but clothed upon, that that which is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now He that maketh us for this very thing is God, Who hath given us the pledge of the Spirit . . . While we are in the body we are absent from the Lord . . . But we are confident and have

a good will to be absent rather from the body and to be present with the Lord. And therefore we labor, whether absent or present, to please Him" (2 Cor., 1 *sqq.*).

*Caterpillar or Butterfly?*

If a caterpillar had the gift of reason it would long for its transformation into a pretty butterfly that everyone admires for its beauty, and that can flit at will from flower to flower in the glowing light of the sun to compare its beauteous colors with those of the flowers, as it were, rather than wish to remain as long as possible an ugly caterpillar which everyone is repelled by and shuns as much as possible. Yet there is an immensely vaster difference between what we shall be clothed with in heaven and our present earthly house of the soul than there is between a butterfly and a caterpillar. Why, then, should a good Sister not groan, as the Apostle says, for the glorious transformation that awaits her in death?

*The Flesh of a Child*

In the Old Testament we read that, through the intervention of the prophet Eliseus, Naaman, the Syrian, was cleansed of leprosy, "and his flesh was restored, like the flesh of a little child" (4 Kings, 5, 14).

The Syrian rejoiced over this change with all his heart and his gratitude was warm and intense. Yet the difference between leprous flesh and the healthy flesh of a little child is not nearly so great as is the difference between the mortal flesh now encasing our soul and the robe of glory which will clothe it in heaven. Why, then, not pant with eager and glad anticipation for so advantageous and magnificent a change?

Before our Lord died for us so painful, horrid, and ignominious a death on the cross to lighten and sweeten our death for us, death indeed was full of unmitigated sadness and unrelieved horrors for its victims. But since our Redeemer conquered death, who was apparently unconquerable and all-domineering, and laid him low, so to speak, every loyal nun at death, and long before her death, while she meditates on its approach, the certainty of it as well as the uncertainty of its hour, may, with St. Paul, taunt death exultingly, saying: "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" (1 Cor., 15, 55.)

*Neither Victory Nor Sting*

"As for me," she says, "O death, you have no victory in sight. You are not to conquer me, but with the aid of Christ's death I am

going to conquer you. You will have no sting for me. Jesus, by His death on the cross for me, took away your sting, your bitterness, and tartness, as far as I am concerned. For me your advent will be the sweetest, and most delicious, and most welcome thing to occur to me in my life on this earth."

She will give the reason of her joy and triumph in the words of the Apostle: "For this corruptible must put on incorruption: and this mortal must put on immortality. And when this mortal hath put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory" (*ib.*, 53, 54).

*The Better Thing*

St Paul lived up to his theory of death expressed in the words quoted above. He told the first Christians: "I am straightened between two: having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ, a thing by far the better. But to abide still in the flesh is needful for you" (Philipp., 1, 23, 24). When the great apostle penned these words he was still in the vigor of life and the possession of health. He was at the acme of his missionary career. He had converted twenty provinces

to the faith of Christ. He was the hero of the first Christians. In their eyes he was a veritable second Christ, every inch a man of God, and a chosen vessel of election. And yet, loved, lauded, and applauded as he was, he desired to die. He did not want to die from a spirit of impatience or despondency over his sufferings; in fact, he was willing to live on for the sake of the Christians and their spiritual needs: but "a thing by far the better" in his eyes was "to be dissolved and to be with Christ".

*She Cares for Her Health*

Similarly a good Religious does not long for death through disappointment and irritation over her condition or experiences in life; she is willing to live out the time that God has allotted to her in the interest of her own salvation and that of others. She is eager, too, to advance the cause of her own community as much and as long as it pleases God to vouchsafe to her the privilege of doing it, remembering that while it takes years to make a good and effective nun, one indiscretion may disqualify and ruin her permanently. Consequently she takes a reasonable care of her health and avoids imperiling it wantonly or thoughtlessly.

Yet over all these and similar considerations towers her desire of being dissolved in order to be with Christ, "a thing by far the better." She has no longing for a lengthy life on earth for its own sake. She knows that this life is but a period of probation. Why desire this period to be protracted on its own account? This life in her view is but an exile from home. Why desire the prolongation of an exile from so dear and enviable a home as is the palace of the King that is waiting for her? This life, no matter how one arranges it, is a valley of tears in which those who are detained in it, if they are quickened by the faith in Christ, sigh incessantly and plaintively for their admission into the paradise of heaven's delights. Why wish that one's sojourn in this sombre valley should run into as many years as possible, when this sojourn keeps us away from the place of ineffable bliss and endless joy?

*St. Paul's Ruling Passion*

To emphasize his lack of fear of death, his love of and desire for it, in fact, in order to be with Christ, St. Paul says: "I die daily" (1 Cor., 15, 31). What one does every day of his own accord he likes to do very much. The more he does it the more he likes it, until it becomes a veritable passion with

him, either in a good or a bad sense. If you see a Sister at the piano every free moment she has, not through compulsion but of her own free will, you are convinced that to play the piano, far from being a torture for her, is her greatest earthly delight. Similarly it was the all-absorbing delight of the great St. Paul all the time to practice and to picture himself dying in the Lord. There was nothing he enjoyed more. It overshadowed in importance and pleasure everything else that entered his life. It gave its color and tone to everyone of his actions, and affected his thought, speech, and bearing through and through.

*A Habit of the Saints*

This is a habit that is universal among the saints of God; also, of course, among the saints of your community. Every time St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi bowed her head for the Gloria Patri in the divine office she imagined she was offering it to the executioners to be chopped off her body in testimony of her faith in Christ. It was an act of spiritual martyrdom. Every Christ-loving nun has the same or a similar custom inuring her more and more in her prepossessing desire to be dissolved and to be with her divine Bridegroom face to face forevermore.

Traveling through Kansas sometime ago, I desired to rest in the train and leisurely read the morning paper when a gentleman in front of me started a conversation. He told me that the previous day, on the very spot which we were then passing at high speed, a young man of seventeen years committed suicide. He waited at the tracks until the train was almost upon him when he deliberately laid his head over the rail. The train severed it from his body.

We are not going to pass judgment on the accountability of this act. God alone can measure that. But the fruit each nun should derive from this episode ought to be a desire on her part always, at a moment's notice, to be willing to surrender her life gladly and cheerfully at the summons of her heavenly Spouse. What the young man in the story did from disgust, she will joyously do from a burning desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ no sooner He calls her, either suddenly or more or less gradually.

*The Great Gain*

St. Paul followed up his holy desire of death, saying: "For to me, to live is Christ: and to die is gain" (Philipp., 1, 21). Everyone likes gain. There is no gain so surpassing grand and thrilling as the gain acquired in

and through death by a loyal follower of Christ. For what is perishable he wins the imperishable. For what is empty and shallow he gains what is solid and substantial. For what is ephemeral he procures what is eternal. For a source of endless tears and heartaches he acquires a haven of unending joys and unalloyed bliss. This applies in a special manner to nuns. They can justly say with St. Paul: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor., 15, 19). Their life on this earth contains little if any gratification for the natural element. Hence their gain through death will be signally great and pronounced because of the extraordinary contrast between the joys of eternity and their toils in this life.

*She Has a Nice Position*

Picture a nun of your community in the most favorable cloistral position imaginable. She is high in office and power, eminently successful in all her undertakings, warmly loved by all her subjects, and highly and universally respected in and outside the convent. In addition she enjoys the best of health, is fired with a noble ambition, and permeated with boundless energy, and an unquenchable love of prayer, virtue, and work. Even for her death in her best years, in the very

prime of womanhood would be a decided, immense, and an infinite gain. She, too, through dying in the Lord would obtain realities for shadows, substance for phantoms, actualities for dreams, joys for sorrows, the everlasting for the momentary, heaven for earth, and God for creatures. What an overwhelmingly profitable, inviting, and tempting bargain!

*Prolonging Life*

Secular persons, whose faith in a future life is either nil or weak; or who live on this earth in a way as to have nothing good to expect in the other life, naturally want to prolong this life as much as possible, provided it is comfortable or tolerable to them. And today the craving for a long earthly life for its own sake is quite general in the world. Doctors, surgeons, and scientists boast that within the last twenty-five years the average human life in the United States has been lengthened by about twenty years.

While the average life of those who survived infancy was only about thirty-seven years a quarter of a century ago, it is about fifty-seven now, they say. And they promise to prolong it to sixty-seven or seventy-seven ere long. Some of them weirdly state there will be a day when science will lengthen

man's life on earth into an indefinite and incalculable number of years, yea, render him immortal, in fact.

*The Bewitching of Vanity*

Utterly rejecting this last mentioned wild statement, the gospel not once endorses the desire for a long earthly life for its own sake. It never tells us we should try to live long. All it impresses upon us is to do our best to live well and always to be ready to depart from this life at a moment's call. We know from the Old Testament that a long life on earth is a blessing often promised and accorded by God. It gives one more time to accumulate merits for heaven. It was in this sense that St. Ignatius of Loyola said he would gladly forfeit the certainty of heaven for fifteen additional minutes in which he could accumulate additional merits for heaven. But again we know from the Bible, that if God chooses to assign a short life to us we have no reason at all to deplore it. "For venerable old age is not that of long time, nor counted by the number of years: but the understanding of a man is grey hairs. And a spotless life is old age. He pleased God and was beloved: and living among sinners he was translated. He was taken away lest wickedness should alter his

understanding, or deceit beguile his soul. For the bewitching of vanity obscureth good things, and the wandering of concupiscence overturneth the innocent mind. Being made perfect in a short space, he fulfilled a long time: for his soul pleased God. Therefore He hastened to bring him out of the midst of iniquities" (Wisdom, 4, 8-14).

About three thousand years ago the Psalmist said: "The days of our years . . . are three score and ten years. But if in the strong they be fourscore years: and what is more of them is labor and sorrow" (Ps. 89, 9, 10). In no appreciable degree has science created any modification or betterment relative to this condition of life. Very few people over seventy are free from labor and sorrow today as little as in previous generations.

*Salvation Is Piece Work*

From our Lord's parable of the vineyard we learn that it is quite possible for some to merit as much in an hour as others merit in a day, making up for the brevity of time by the intensity of their fervor. Salvation is not time work, but, so to speak, piece work, depending on what we do, and how we do it. For this reason the gospel has us to attend chiefly to how well we live rather than to how long we might possibly live.

This must comfort and encourage those Sisters who feel their end approaching while they are still in middle age or, even, as not seldom happens, when they have hardly begun their religious life and, as they put it, have not yet done anything for their community. If God calls them home there is no valid reason imaginable why they should not congratulate themselves most heartily on it, let alone regret it in the least. Their death alone, accepted with this spirit of faith, resignation to God's will, and a burning desire to be with Christ, will benefit the community in a worth while and substantial way much more than a merely long life of indifferent virtue or even of distinct virtue would benefit it.

*In the Prime of Manhood*

Our Lord, Who laid down His life of His own accord, as He tells us, died when He was but thirty-three years old; hence in the prime of manhood when life ordinarily begins to grow interesting and effective on a large scale. St. Teresa of the Child Jesus died when she was twenty-four; Joan of Arc passed away when she was seventeen years of age. These two as well as many other holy women "being made perfect in a short space, fulfilled a long time".

So do many of our young nuns today, whom God summons home apparently before their time, and hastens "to bring out of the midst of iniquities" which this wicked world is known to be even for one who sees it and gets in relation with it only from afar, as nuns do.

*The Holyday of Her Life*

For a true spouse of Christ the day of death is by way of excellence the feastday and holyday of her life. Whatever other festive days she may have had in her life: the day of her first Holy Communion; of her clothing, and her profession; her namedays from year to year; the days on which she received her academic or professional degrees; her silver and golden jubilee days; the day of her first elevation to a superiorship, or another position of high trust and prestige; the day of her inthronization as abbess or as superior-general of the entire order: all these and similar days, with their more or less reasons for unalloyed gladness, will vanish in contrast with the splendor and joy of the holyday of her death in the Lord. This is for her in the best sense of the word graduation day, pay day, and the day of her everlasting nuptials to the Lamb of God.

*Graduation Day*

Every girl longs for the arrival of the day of her graduation and rejoices when it is finally at hand. You have no doubt been graduated in the past from the grammar or high school, or from business college, or from a nurse's training school. It was for you a great relief and a source of much joy. Still on this earth graduation does not mean the cessastion of labor and trouble but rather the increase of them. It usually consigns the graduate to greater responsibility and closer application than she had to render before.

*A Tragic Prediction*

At all events, she has to resign her diploma and other honors of her graduation in death. They will not accompany her farther than the grave. This was rather dramatically and tragically brought out in a community of nuns recently. A very accomplished mature Sister who had acquired a number of honorable certificates and degrees in her profession as a high school teacher, when she saw several young Sisters returning from summer school rather late for dinner, said to them as they passed her at the table: "Take it from me, Sisters, the degrees you are after will mean very little to you when they put you under the sod." Three hours later she un-

expectedly suffered a stroke and died: as if to demonstrate by her own example the truth of her assertion.

How different the graduation that occurs to a good nun in death. It means that "God shall wipe away all tears from her eyes: and death shall be no more. Nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more: for the former things are passed away" (*vid.* Apoc., 21, 4). And He will transfer her to a place where she "shall be inebriated with the plenty of His house; and He shall make her drink of the torrent of His pleasure. For with Him is the fountain of life: and in His light she shall see light" (*vid.* Ps. 35, 9, 10).

### *A Bishop or a Cardinal*

Whenever a girl is graduated and receives a diploma she is pleased if many of her relatives and friends are present at the festivity to share her joy and to offer their felicitations. She is delighted also if the one from whom she receives her diploma is a very distinguished person, high in dignity and public recognition, say a bishop or a cardinal. And she is particularly happy if the notes she receives are very commendatory and flattering, and far beyond the expectation of herself and others, and the best of her class, making her a subject of

special congratulation on the part of all those who are present and any way interested in her.

Her joy at her success is unusually great if before her splendid graduation she had all sorts of misgivings as to whether she would succeed in being graduated at all; at any rate, if she would succeed, she was quite sure, and perhaps others were of the same opinion, that she would be among the last, if not the last, of her class.

*A Nun's Final Graduation*

All these and similar motives of gladness and joy, but in an infinitely higher manner, concur in the final graduation of a nun at death. The distinguished dispenser of her diploma will be no other than the King of kings, Jesus Christ, her own dear Spouse. While no one else will be present at the conferring of her diploma in death save God and herself, Jesus takes it upon Himself to publish her honor and glory to the courts of heaven at once, and to all mankind on the day of retribution.

How happy she will be when, after all her fear and dread regarding the possible outcome of judgment, our Lord assures her that her notes in the various virtues are exceedingly good, far beyond her and her fellow Sisters' expectations; in fact, the best of her

community or of her clothing or profession class. She, who perhaps considered herself and was looked upon by the Sisters at large as being the least in holiness of all the nuns, is now declared by the divine Judge to be the first of all. "Many that are first shall be last: and the last shall be first" (Matt., 19, 30).

*Splendid Notes*

Simultaneously with the Judge's verdict she will receive His most tender and loving felicitations as well as the congratulations of all the blessed in heaven, among whom no doubt there will be those with whom she stood in close relation of blood, friendship, or religion, here on earth. And her marvelous success and gratifying notes: say she received 100 per cent in prayer, humility, and chastity; 99 per cent in poverty, obedience, and charity; 98½ per cent in zeal, mortification, and detachment from creatures; and in no virtue did she fall below 98 per cent: this wonderful record, I say, will be flashed before the vision of the blessed forever and ever. Why, then, should she not be desirous for the approach of this fortunate day, when she will be so lavishly compensated for all her labors, sacrifices, and pains, and will be graduated to the goal which was her one absorbing ambition in life?

*Pay Day*

For a devoted nun the day of her death is pay day in the highest and most satisfying degree. St. Paul was wont to rehabilitate his drooping spirits and inflame his lagging courage by timely reflections on this pay day of all pay days, saying: "As to the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice which the Lord the just Judge will render to me in *that day*" (2 Tim., 4, 8).

What person on this earth is not eager for the approach of pay day? For every laborer it is the day of all days. It never comes too soon, nor too often. Even when the pay is known beforehand to be but little, the day is longingly looked forward to and heartily welcomed when it comes. Many people spend their pay either before they receive it or soon after. It has a way of not staying long with them. If a person, on pay day, receives a check immensely in excess of her brightest anticipations: say instead of her weekly twenty-five dollars she would get a bonus of a hundred thousand dollars: her happiness would threaten her with heart failure.

*A Huge and Startling Sum*

Or suppose a girl of eighteen years got a position at thirty dollars a week, with the stipulation of a two dollar raise every year

she stayed with the firm. Instead of drawing her weekly salary she would let the firm keep it for her with the understanding that she was to receive six per cent interest on it, to be compounded semi-annually. Meanwhile she was working regularly year in and year out without attending to the gradual and rather voluminous accumulation of her salary. Imagine her surprise when at fifty or sixty years of age she would ask for her pay and receive a huge and startling sum, far beyond anything she expected or ever dreamed of.

Such will be, in an immeasurably higher degree, the lot of the conscientious nun at her death. Here on earth she lives, works, toils, and suffers as a matter of course, whether in a high and prominent or in a low and inconspicuous cloistral position. She knows through her holy faith that God rewards everything she does, thinks, plans, desires, omits, forfeits, or foregoes for His honor; but by and by she acts so much out of love to Him that virtue and goodness become a second nature to her, as it were, and only rarely she adverts to the specific amount of pay she is storing up with God for herself; although, like St. Paul, she never loses sight of the great day of her everlasting reward. Meanwhile each merit she gains is greater than the previous one, owing to the

compound interest or additional credit with which God endows it because of her antecedent merits.

*When God Gives a Bonus*

Picture her glad astonishment and ecstatic surprise when God reveals to her in death the incalculable volume of her merit and "the eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor., 4, 17), which is ready for her in heaven. It far outruns every anticipation she had ever had and dwarfs every prospect she ever dared to entertain of it. Against this revelation of munificence on the part of God the aforesaid bonus of a hundred thousand dollars is like a fleeting speck of dust against the noon-day sun. Nor has the rewarded Sister to fear that her pay will ever grow less or slip away from her. It is hers beyond a possibility of loss or diminution forever and ever.

*Dissatisfaction and Strikes*

On pay day here on earth there is usually considerable dissatisfaction among the employees in view of the unfairness and inequality of the pay meted out to the individual laborers. Incriminations and recriminations are not wanting. Not seldom serious clashes ensue in the form of strikes and other unpleasant disturbances. The employers are

charged with paying some of their men, who apparently do little else besides wearing out swivel chairs, too much, whereas they pay others who do good and hard work far too little in proportion.

There are cases when these charges are ill-founded; but again there are frequent instances when they are but too well based on facts. And even when there is no room for a charge of unfairness on the part of the employers in rendering wages for work or service done, jealousy easily arises among the employees for the mere fact that some get high wages while others receive but a comparatively meagre reward. Many an employee would be very happy with his wage as it is, if he was aware that it surpassed that of all his co-employees, or was at least as good as any of their wages. But now that he knows that his is the lowest, or as low as any wage, he is dissatisfied and disgruntled.

*No Tinge of Jealousy*

All these and like displeasures find no room when God dispenses His reward at death. His dispensation not only is just but it is at once and fully recognized by everyone concerned as absolutely just from every angle and view-point. There is a soothing satisfac-

tion in this for everyone who is rewarded. Nor is there a tinge of jealousy in any soul because of the greater reward vouchsafed to others than to her. She has allotted to her all the celestial glory she is capable of containing; hence she is completely satisfied and has no envy of those whose capacity for joy and whose heavenly glory is larger.

In truth, since she derives all her glory from her love of God and His love of her, whatever pleases God, also in the distribution of heaven's glory, also pleases and beatifies her. Hence, whether she leads her community in glory or is the very last of all the Sisters of her order in the ranks of the blessed, she is entirely contented and unspeakably happy. Why, then, should a good nun not desire such a glorious pay day to hasten along, the quicker the better?

*The Nun's Nuptials*

For the true nun the day of death is the joyous day of her eternal nuptials with the Lamb of God. Of this day may be understood the words of the Apocalypse (19, 7): "Let us be glad and rejoice and give glory to Him. For the marriage of the Lamb is come: and His wife hath prepared herself." Her sojourn on earth is for the loyal Religious the period

of her mystic courtship with her divine Spouse, in which He tries her out to find whether she may be wedded to Him in an everlasting mystic union of inseparable love and undying joy. If at death she is found to have been faithful and worthy of the eternal espousals with the Lamb, the wedding is celebrated with all the pomp and festivity of heaven, not merely for a day, but for all the ages of eternity.

*Made of Lead*

On earth there are few, if any, things a girl who desires marriage longs for more fervently and impatiently than the day of her marriage to a bridegroom whom she esteems and loves with all her heart. The time that is still between her and the glad feast seems to be made of lead, so heavy it seems, and so slow it moves. Every other object is crowded out of this girl's mind and heart by the thought of and the desire for her wedding day.

When the day finally dawns she is extremely happy and literally bounds with joy. It is for her the day par excellence. In reference to it she exclaims in the words of the Bible: "This is the Lord's doing: and it is wonderful in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord

hath made: let us be glad and rejoice therein" (Ps. 117, 23, 24).

*She Doubts*

Alas, such is the instability and unreliableness of human nature that in many cases the onetime happy bride, a few months or even several weeks after the wedding, doubts seriously whether the Lord made that day at all, and she blames herself decidedly for rejoicing in it, and regrets ever having lived to see it.

There are no doubt many happy human brides whose nuptial happiness endures until death; but they, too, usually find their anticipations of their married happiness to have far surpassed the reality of it, and their youthful dreams of connubial bliss antedating their wedding are soon discovered to have been more an illusion of their love-lorn fancy than a prognostication that was ever to be in any way met by the stern reality of wedded life.

*The Third Heaven*

Exactly the reverse of all this is the actual experience of a loyal Sister in her nuptials with the Lamb of God in death. Not only does her heavenly Spouse not disappoint her

in the least, but the happiness He has in store for His dear bride is infinitely beyond any conceptions she has or ever had of it and far in excess of the most daring and apparently extravagant dreams she ever pursued with regard to it. Now indeed she understands why St. Paul, after having been ravished to the third heaven, exclaimed: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard: neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor., 2, 9).

In view of this magnificent feast, which will begin for her the moment she closes her eyes in death, why should the good nun for whatsoever reason be reluctant to see it approach? And why should she not say with the spouse in the Canticle of Canticles: "I sought Him Whom my soul loveth . . . I found Him Whom my soul loveth. I held Him: and I will not let Him go" (Cant., 3, 1, 4). "I to my Beloved, and His turning is towards me" (*ib.*, 7, 10).

### "*Did You Hear Me Sing?*"

While St. Elizabeth, the first member of the Third Order of St. Francis in Germany, was dying she went into a trance. When she came to, she said to those about her bed:

"Did you hear me sing? I sang as well as I could." No one had heard her sing. She had been singing to herself in a mental transport of joy because of her approaching death.

St. Francis of Assisi, the great imitator of St. Paul in all things, especially in his love of Jesus Christ Crucified and in his desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ, although but forty-four years old at the time, sang not only mentally at the approach of death but actually recited the psalm, alternating with his brethren, as he lay disrobed on the bare earth sighing and pleading with death to hasten his coming: "I cried to the Lord with my voice: with my voice I made supplication to the Lord. . . Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy Name: the just wait for me, until Thou reward me" (Ps. 141, 1, 8).

*She Saw Blood*

When St. Teresa of the Infant Jesus, in her early twenties, noticed one morning that she had spit blood during the night, and recognizing it as a sign of an illness that would soon end in death, she rejoiced over the discovery with all her heart. For her it was nothing else than a sweet hint from her divine Lover indicating that He would soon

call her home. Nothing could have pleased her more.

In view of these inspiring examples and of all we have considered regarding a good nun's death, every Sister, when death comes upon her, should be in a mood to sing if not actually, at least mentally, the words of the Psalmist: "I rejoiced at the things that were said to me: We shall go into the house of the Lord" (Ps. 121, 1). Meanwhile, however, in case the Lord seems to tarry in her regard—and to her He will seem to tarry if she loves Him as she professes to love Him—she thanks Him for the days He assigns to her in His service on earth for His glory, the salvation of souls, and the increase of her personal merit and celestial glory. She remembers the words of Jesus: "The harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few" (Matt., 9, 37). Old as she may therefore grow to be, she never ceases praying with St. Martin: "Lord, if I am still necessary to Thy people, I do not refuse work." Yet with all her solicitude for others, as soon as God calls her home she is more than ready to repeat the words of her dying Savior: "It is consummated" (John, 19, 30). "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit" (Luke, 23, 46).

# LECTURE XIX.

## JUDGMENT

### PART ONE

*"It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment"* (Hebr., 9, 27).

ALL MEN are interested in appointments. Sisters form no exception to this rule. A nun is especially concerned about her first appointment in the convent. When she is to be missioned the first time she is keenly eager to learn to what place she will be assigned. This appointment looms big in her eyes. Nor will she lose much of this keenness as she grows older in the cloister, and one appointment follows the other in regard to her. The first time she is appointed to a charge that is unusual for her, say the superiorship, she is ordinarily much affected. She is hardly less so, though in a different way, the first time she is demoted from a higher office.

*Spicy News*

A Sister is interested not only in appointments concerning herself but also in those affecting other Sisters. One of the chief morsels of news in a community is the report of new appointments, of changes and transfers

among the Sisters. And a Sister hardly ever grows old enough to be indifferent to the reception of this popular cloistral news.

This is by no means a reflection upon the attitude of the Sisters: on the contrary, it is rather a compliment to them. It would seem to bespeak a lack of interest in the community's welfare if a nun were not normally interested in the assignments given the various Sisters for the promotion of its cause. A wise and religiously poised nun, of course, is cautious that her interest in this as well as in other matters does not become abnormal, morbid, ludicrous, and obnoxious.

*The Great Appointment*

There is one appointment in which neither you nor any other Sister can ever become too vitally, intensely, and absorbingly interested. This is the first appointment you received, not only as a Sister but long before you ever became a Sister. Though it was the first appointment decreed for you, it will be the last one to be kept by you. It is expressed in the words of my text: "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment." This appointment is supremely democratic and just, comprising all without exception. It does "not regard the person of men" (Matt., 22, 16). It is the same for

the highest and the lowest. No art of subterfuge, or craft of intrigue, or ruse of evasion will avail the most astute to circumvent, or block, or undo this paramount appointment. Nor is any dignity lofty enough to even suggest the possibility of an exemption from it.

*An Appointment With the King*

It is and always will be the appointment of appointments for a nun as well as for all men. Hence you can never keep it too much in mind or prepare yourself too elaborately or meticulously for it. How excited and keyed up to the highest pitch of attention you would be, and how you would prime and primp yourself, if you had an appointment with a high-standing personage, say with a bishop, cardinal, or the Holy Father himself. Yet what would an appointment with these dignitaries mean in contrast with the appointment you have with the King of heaven and earth at death?

*Colorless and Storiless*

If you keep this appointment well by dying in the love of God and being ready for His favorable judgment, then it will matter little to you personally what appointments you got or did not get in life, and how well

or how poorly, in the eyes of men, you acquitted yourself of the appointments you had: whether you were an inconspicuous subject or celebrated superior; whether you were an outstanding success, or an egregious failure in the eyes of your contemporaries; whether your name will go down into the history of your order emblazoned with fame and glory, or whether it will appear in its records only as the name of a colorless and storiless member regarding whom the less comment is made the better, because of her personal negligibleness and professional obscurity: all this will not matter at all if in death you can say confidently to God: "Lord, Thou didst deliver to me five talents. Behold I have gained other five over and above" (Matt., 25, 20); and if you are like the wise virgins who, when "the bridegroom came, . . . were ready" and "went in with him to the marriage" (*ib.*, 10).

*Discovered and Condemned*

On the other hand, if you fail to keep the pristine appointment given you by the Lord: you are not ready when death comes and you are are ill-prepared for judgment: then, alas, it will not avail you a particle to have received the most complimentary appointments in your order: to superiorships and other

ordinary and extraordinary missions, commissions, dignities, and honors, accruing to you in consequence of your signal talents, ability, and success in nursing, teaching, organizing, building, in the quest of money for the community, in paying off debts, in procuring public recognition and prestige for the Sisters, and the like: for you will be discovered and condemned by the Judge as one who was "careful and . . . troubled about many things" (Luke, 10, 41), but who neglected the "one thing" that was "necessary"; and as one of those foolish virgins who belatedly "came . . . saying: Lord, Lord, open to us. But He answering said: Amen, I say to you, I know you not" (Matt., 25, 11, 12).

*Exceeding Swift*

The appointment to die was given you as soon as you came into existence. The first step you took in life steered directly towards your grave. Every step you have taken since or are taking now brought or brings you closer to the resting place of your mortal remains. As fast and as continuously as you are verging towards death, death is hastening towards you, and at best it is only a question of a brief space of time when the two of you will meet to keep the appointment of the Lord. "The great day of the

Lord is near: it is near and exceeding swift" (Sophon., 1, 14).

If you knew the superior had decided upon a very important appointment regarding yourself you would, even before she manifested to you the details of it and the time of its execution, be altogether preoccupied with the thought of it and dispose yourself well for its proper reception. You would do this in spite of knowing that superiors, being human, are known to change their minds and withdraw appointments they have agreed upon and even published to the party in question, yea, to the entire community. Unforeseen circumstances not seldom demand the change and withdrawal alluded to.

*A Flattering Appointment*

In view of this, as was explained, uncertain appointment that had reference, let us say, to the establishment of a new foundation that would be of much moment to the community and involve material honor for yourself, you would not allow yourself to be troubled or vexed by the little occurrences of your daily cloistral life: whether this or that Sister thought well of you or not; or whether this or that sinister remark was made against you. You would entirely ignore or brush

away these and similar things as trifles unworthy of your attention.

Altogether immersed in the thought of the new appointment awaiting you, you would live, so to say, in a different world from the one actually surrounding you, and like a stranger to the latter you would not allow its atmosphere to affect you sinisterly in any way. You would be insensible to its influences, being prepossessed by the appointment in the offing which controlled all your thoughts, dreams, plans, and schemes.

*A Sure Appointment*

How fortunate would a Sister be who allowed herself to be thus possessed and fully mastered by the thought of the appointment God gave her no sooner she was born, but the time of the execution of which He is hiding from her! She is sure this appointment will be kept no matter what else may or may not betide. God never changes or withdraws His appointments.

If she is at all conscious of the trend and possible relative issue of this momentous appointment in her regard she cannot but keep it so prominently and all-controllingly in her mind that all other things, be they fortunate or adverse, agreeable or disagreeable, flatter-

ing or humiliating, will leave her quite indifferent and unresponsive, save inasmuch as they may serve her—and both categories may be of equal service to her in this respect—to meet the appointment of appointments well.

*She Smiles Complacently*

All the cloistral appointments which now have a tendency to fluster or upset her and render her more or less happy or miserable for the time being, would then leave her entirely unaffected. She would but smile contently and complacently whenever her companions wondered if she was not exalted into the heavens of ecstasy, or lowered into the pit of melancholy by this or that appointment. Her preoccupation with her primeval and only necessary appointment would make her as insensible to the pretendedly fortunate as to the seemingly unfortunate assignment.

The little word "once" in the quoted text of St. Paul has a tremendous significance and an immense weight. If we could die twice, or as often as we required it in order to succeed well with the consequential act, the situation would not be so alarming. We could chance it once or again, relatively, and if we failed we could be on our guard to be ready to die well the subsequent time, after having been warned by a prior sad experience.

*No Margin*

But now we have no such margin. We must either die well the one and only time we shall be called upon to do so, or every prospect of redress or recovery from the eternal misery to which a bad death consigns us is irretrievably taken from us. Such is the terse and emphatic declaration of Him Who alone is the arbiter of life and death, and Whose sentence in judgment will be final.

In the previous meditation on death we considered that it is a veritable feast for the nun who is ready to die in the Lord. In the highest sense it is for her the supreme graduation day, pay day, and the day of her mystic nuptials with the Lamb of God. But for the nun who, like the foolish virgins, is not prepared when the Bridegroom comes, and whose lamp is devoid of oil, or whose soul is bereft of sanctifying grace, all these beautiful conceptions of death for the loyal nun are thrown directly into reverse to serve unto the inexpressible woe and measureless despair of the unfortunate onetime spouse of Christ, Who is now to be her judge and the stern executor of His own terrific and final sentence over her.

*Howls of Despair*

Instead of the day of her death being a holy day for the faithless nun it is for her "the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God, Who will render to every man according to his works" (Rom., 2, 5, 6). It will be for her a day of boundless gloom and inconceivable sadness. Instead of the inspiring chants of the blessed she will hear the howls of despair of the damned. In place of seeing the great white throne of God and the Ancient of days sitting on it surrounded by ineffable splendor, she will see the horrid pool of damnation and the devil who is consigned to it forever and ever. Instead of having the sweet freedom of the children of God and the delicious liberty of His home, she is bound to the chains of desperation and confined in the prison of irremediable melancholy for all eternity.

*Low Notes*

What is graduation day in the most thrilling sense for the loyal nun is the day of unmitigated failure for the disloyal Sister. It would be bad enough on earth for a girl if, for instance, in the high school or college department, or in the nurses' training school, everyone of her class would be graduated with high honors except herself. She would

fail ignominiously because of her disgracefully low notes.

It would be worse if, when her class of postulants was to receive the habit, or her class of novices was to take vows, and all the friends and relatives of the Sisters, including her own, would be assembled in the chapel for the glad ceremony: the bishop would arise in the chapel before the entire assembly, and with a stern mien and a severe tone of voice that preempted every challenge or entreaty he would point the finger of reproach and scorn at her and say so everyone could hear and understand it: "Sister, or, Young Lady, I have heard something about you. You are unworthy of this holy garb. Leave the church forthwith and never show your face here again. Your very presence is a profanation of the temple of God. Begone, at once, and forever!"

*She Would Shrink Together*

Such an experience would make the person shrink together from fear and consternation, and would make her prefer death to the endurance of the terrible shame. Still, there would be a resource and a remedy; for where there is life there is hope. She who failed in an examination could take it again and again until she succeeded; or if she did not succeed

in one field she could attempt another and make good in it.

Even the person who was publicly repulsed by the bishop could bear her disgrace in the spirit of penance, recover virtue and piety, and thus qualify to be received in the order and to take vows later; or she might try another order and get on nicely; or she could return to the world and, strengthened by her past sad experiences, she could lead a good life and save her soul.

*Humility: 65 Per Cent*

But when at death "the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" (1 Peter, 2, 25) finds a nun who was grossly recreant to her sacred vocation, He turns upon her in all His wrath and says, as it were: "Sister, you have not made the grade. Your notes in the observance of the vows and the various virtues are far below par. Of all the members of your community yours is the worst and most disgraceful report. Your humility is 65 per cent; your poverty 53 per cent, your obedience 61 per cent, your chastity 55 per cent, your charity 50 per cent. How do you expect with such a record to enter there where nothing unclean can ever enter? There is no Sister in heaven with a report in any way approaching yours in demerit and dishonor.

Begone from Me, therefore, forever. You have failed completely and abominably. You will never be graduated in all eternity."

This crushing and annihilating sentence will not leave a single gleam of hope to the wretched subject of it. She will be an outcast in the full and unlimited meaning of the hard and cold word, and her feeling over it will be the more overwhelming the less she can hide from herself that her everlasting ostracism from God and everybody who is lovable, and from heaven and everything that is desirable, is entirely and exclusively due to herself who brought it on consciously, wantonly, and stubbornly.

*He Spilled the Ink*

We read of Philip II of Spain that he was known to be a stern and severe man. One day he dictated to his secretary an important state letter that had to be dispatched without delay. In his nervous hurry to please his king the secretary picked up, instead of the vase of blotting sand, the inkwell and poured its contents over the letter, thus practically rendering it worthless. The king gave him an angry look at which the poor secretary was seized with such a mortal fear that he withered away and died with fright.

Yet Philip was a mere mortal man. Imagine the fate of the onetime spouse of Jesus, who has enjoyed the mystic sweetness and tenderness of His loving kindness and delicious intimacy, when in judgment He of a sudden turns upon her in all His divine justice, exasperation, and wrath. Her very descent into hell like a flash of lightning will be in a way a relief to her as an escape from the ire of her former dearest Lover.

All this is sad to contemplate and unpleasant to dwell on. Yet it is wise if we now consider its possibility regarding us so we arrange or, as the case may be, rearrange our life in such a manner that we need not fear lest the reality of it might ever overtake us.

*A Mere Drop of Water*

For a good nun the day of her death is pay day. Against the pay she will then receive the whole world is not even as much as a drop of water is against all the oceans of the earth. And her reward will be in proportion to the vast merits she accumulated far beyond her own expectations, as was explained in the previous lecture.

For the wayward nun, however, who dies in sin, the day of her death will be the day of her extreme and unmentionable punishment at the hands of her Lord and God.

And this punishment, too, will be in proportion to her unforgiven sins. As merits increase continually and fast in a soul that lives the life of God, so demerits accumulate incessantly and rapidly in a soul that is estranged from God. And if she dies in this estrangement, even as the good nun is overcome by the revelation of the weight of glory awaiting her, she will be staggered and dumbfounded by the volume of the anger of God that meets her.

*A Woeful Treasure*

Such a person St. Paul tries to save from her impending doom by exhorting her thus: "Thinkest thou . . . that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and patience and long-suffering? Knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance? But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou *treasurest up to thyself wrath*, against the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God: Who will render to every man according to his works" (Rom., 2, 3-6).

If a girl, on pay day, expected a substantial bonus and a most flattering promotion for her work; but instead of it she would be dishonorably dismissed from her position,

heavily fined, and sent to the penitentiary for life for her unfaithful service: it would be a crushing blow to her feelings and prostrate her with grief. It would be as nothing, however, compared to the fate of the unfortunate nun who appeared unprepared before the judgment seat of God; and who, instead of being rewarded with the bliss of heaven, learned that she was to be punished by the fires of hell.

*The Saddest Funeral*

In death the Christ-like nun celebrates mystic nuptials with the Lamb of God the gladness and transport of which will never end. The faithless nun, who expires in mortal sin and, consequently, as an enemy of God, instead of being wedded forever to Jesus in the realm of endless love, will be buried with the devil in the pit of unending tortures. In place of a joyous marriage feast her death will be the saddest funeral conceivable, with no spiritual resurrection in sight. Then will be verified in her regard the terrible words which Jesus said of Judas: "It were better for him, if that man had not been born" (Matt., 26, 24).

I remember reading of a very sad event which took place several years ago in an

Ohio city. A young and exemplary Catholic girl of a fine family was to be married to a splendid and model Catholic young man, also of a good family, belonging to the same parish as the other. The girl had the correct Catholic instinct in desiring to concentrate whatever solemnity was to surround her marriage on the ceremony in the church.

*No Expense Was Spared*

She said that as she expected to be married but once, she intended to make the feast as grand and memorable as lay in her power. Both families had ample means. Hence no expense was spared to render the feast according to her liking. She requested a solemn Mass and those decorations of the altar, sanctuary, and church which were customary at sumptuous weddings in her parish church.

She appointed her best and dearest girl friends for her bridesmaids, and also had a maid of honor and flower girls of her own selection. She left nothing undone to have the nicest and most impressive wedding feast possible which she and her prospective husband could recall and dwell on with delight all the days of their wedded life.

When she was satisfied that all the details of the happy day were sufficiently attended

to she was all eagerness for it to come along, being sure it would be one grand and wondrous day for her. Alas, three or four days before the wedding she took suddenly ill and died. The day set for her marriage was turned into the day of her burial. What was to be her wedding Mass was her funeral Mass. Her intended bridesmaids were her pallbearers.

*Indescribably Sad*

Her husband-to-be was her chief mourner. For him and the surviving relatives and friends the occasion was indescribably sad; the more so because of the contrast between the girl's glittering dreams and the grim reality of the day. For the girl, herself, however, the event was actually a very happy one. Good and pious as she was, she had been even more intent on preparing herself spiritually for the worthy reception of the sacrament of holy matrimony than on making the material preparations for the feast. She was more ready to receive her divine Bridegroom in her heart than she was to welcome an earthly spouse to her bosom. For her, therefore, her death meant her eternal espousals to the divine Lover of pure souls, which were infinitely preferable to the temporary

marriage with a human bridegroom who, just because he is human, is somehow disappointing in almost every case.

But when the day of death, which for the nun is intended to be her ecstatic mystic wedding to the King of kings, turns out to be her everlasting funeral, there is not a single feature to redeem or mollify ever so little the horrid sadness and the terrific gloom of it. The only way to avoid this most disastrous of eventualities is to have a sane and solid fear of judgment before its approach, and to prepare for it in good time. "Behold now is the acceptable time: behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor., 6, 2).

*She Wanted a Sweet Death*

Several years ago a young lady in Cincinnati, Ohio, being impatient of life because of her worries and troubles, decided to put an end to it by consuming all the ice cream she could despatch. After she had partaken of an excessive volume of it she suffered violent cramps and fierce convulsions. They hurriedly carried her to the hospital where the doctor relieved her stomach and brought her back to consciousness. When he asked her why she ate so much ice cream, she replied: "I wanted to die a sweet death."

Every nun is fully justified in desiring to have a sweet death when the time of her earthly sojourn is over. She will accomplish this desire best by dying daily after the manner of St. Paul, and by saying more by her conduct than her words: "For to me, to live is Christ: and to die is gain" (Philipp., 1, 21).

Many Sisters of your community—and there is no reason why you should not be one of them—die sweetly and ecstatically in the spirit every day. They die through their mystical absorption in their heavenly Spouse by acts of vivid faith, flaming love, untold sorrow for sin, and an unquenchable desire to be with Jesus really, entirely, indivisibly, and forever. Their first waking thought in the morning is a loving rehearsal of their death in and for Jesus. They continue this rehearsal throughout the day in various forms and divers degrees until they fall asleep at night. And if they had the choice of their dreams these, too, would revolve about their death in Christ. It is their one indoor and outdoor spiritual occupation. Because they rehearse dying so much and so well, they cannot fail, when they actually die, to make the Sisters who are witnesses of their death exclaim in holy envy: "Let my soul die the death of the just; and my last end be like to them" (Numbers, 23, 10).

# LECTURE XX.

## JUDGMENT

### PART TWO

> *"We must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the proper things of the body, according as he hath done, whether it be good or evil"* (2 Cor., 5, 10).

SPIRITUAL writers consider the sober and sensible fear of judgment as a sign of predestination to eternal life. St. Paul confesses having it, saying: "I am not conscious to myself of anything. Yet am I not hereby justified: but He that judgeth me is the Lord, . . . Who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsel of the hearts" (1 Cor., 4, 4, 5). Contrariwise, the most dangerous attitude a nun can assume is to underrate and make light of the judgment that is impending.

*A Girl Takes An Examination*

Say a girl was to take an examination for the profession of a teacher or a nurse. Her real friends, persons who had experience in the matter, would advise her to have a

serious conception of the examination she was planning to take, for it would cover much ground and would go into considerable detail of matter; and only a close and thorough application to study would qualify her to pass it with credit. She would not like so stern a counsel, and would turn to some of her gay girl companions for advice on the matter.

They would aim merely at making her feel good, regardless of the consequences, and would have her believe, entirely inexperienced in the matter themselves, that the examination was the merest matter of form, in which only a few questions of a very general nature were asked which every school child could answer without an effort. In fact, by the very manner of his question the examiner invariably suggested or prompted the answer he wanted. Hence she would be foolish to be worried in the least about the examination ahead of her. The less she thought of and was concerned about it, the better she would fare.

### *He Is Her Friend*

The frivolous girl would at once agree upon this broad and easy view of the matter and regulate her preparation or lack of preparation for the examination accordingly. What-

ever other fears would survive this soothing and heartening advice she would cast off by saying within herself: "The main examiner is a particular friend of mine and of my whole family. He will not be hard on me but, because of his very friendship, he will help me through somehow; in fact, I am sure he will arrange matters so that, little as I know of the subjects of the examination, I shall pass with particular credit and signal honor."

Fortified in this self-delusion the girl would meet the approaching examination without a tremor or even the slightest misgiving. But no sooner she faced the examiners, and saw the serious, matter-of-fact, and altogether unromantic expression on their faces, and heard the earnest and substantial questions, covering every part of the subject with scrupulous minuteness, which they addressed to her and expected her to answer readily, correctly, and fully, her version of the judgment would change completely.

*Too Late*

Then, however, it would be too late to adjust herself to its demands. She would cut a most humiliating and disgraceful figure. Nor would it avail her to say: "I never expected the examiners would be so rigorous, accurate, and comprehensive in the pro-

pounding of questions. I did not look forward to such attention to detail and to so much solemn seriousness in the matter. Besides, I confidently hoped the friendship of the chief examiner would see me through nicely and honorably."

The examiners would tell her coldly she should have expected and prepared for just such an examination if she desired to obtain the diploma of a teacher or a nurse; that ordinary common sense might have told her as much; that a certificate which is gained without labor means nothing; that she has only herself to blame if now she is dishonored and repudiated as a candidate for the profession she ambitioned; the profession would be disgraced by the admission of so unworthy a candidate; and that she should shed her bitter tears of regret not over her failure to make the grade, but over her unjustifiable thoughtlessness in neglecting to prepare for the examination which she knew she had to take in order to achieve her goal.

*Intensely Hurt*

Referring to his friendship for her and her family, the chief examiner would declare baldly: "Just because I was your and the family's friend and thought so much of you I felt sure you would come to this examination

perfectly equipped, so I could feel proud of you as eminently justifying my partiality for you, and so I could honor you with a splendid and flattering certificate. Instead of that you come here to disgrace me publicly by your laziness and ignorance, so that I have to be ashamed of ever having bestowed my friendship upon you. I am intensely hurt and decidedly disappointed."

This will be the issue and verdict, only in a more definite and crushing degree, in the judgment of the disloyal nun who deceives herself into believing, in the wake of careless and frivolous Religious like herself, that the less she worries about judgment the better she is off; that the Lord pays no attention to the details which books, sermons, retreat-lectures, and certain Sisters make so much of; that the judgment will only be a matter of form in which nothing in particular is discussed or sifted, and used as evidence; and that, even if her conduct did not warrant it, the Judge, being her and the community's friend, would let her pass gloriously for that reason alone.

### *Her Eyes Are Opened*

Her eyes will be opened in judgment if she dies in such deplorable blindness of mind. Then she will say, too, in utter consternation:

"I never expected the Judge to pry into such details as the observance of the vows or holy rule; the forgiveness of injuries; zeal for souls; humility, mortification, and the like. I was convinced my very religious garb would be a passport unto success in judgment. Now I see that it means nothing of itself, but that the behavior of the one who wears it is the only thing that counts. I never dreamed judgment would be anything like that. And Jesus' friendship and predilection for me, which I felt would guarantee me a splendid diploma for heaven, avail me nothing now when I need them so much."

Our Savior will retort that she should have known better. She was instructed and warned regarding judgment in season and out of season all the days of her convent life. Hence she is inexcusable. And as for His love and preference for her, they made Him hope she would justify them by being exceedingly well prepared for judgment. Instead of that, she disgraces Him and makes Him regret, as it were, ever having called her to the convent and chosen her to be His consecrated spouse, in view of the careless and sinful life she led.

### *A Bitter Denunciation*

Her tears of remorse are now too late. Had she shed them when He bade her to

do it: in the time of retreat, for example, they would have got her ready for a most complimentary judgment: but now they must serve her only as the bitter denunciation of her criminal frivolity and iniquitous neglect. No one can imagine a more desperate situation than that of this wretched onetime nun.

As she passed through the convent door the first time, she felt she was being admitted to the ante-chamber of heaven. Now, when her body is being carried through the convent chapel portals to be deposited in its last resting place, her soul is already consigned to the fires of hell. Instead of being thrilled by the beautiful inscription which she saw or seemed to see on the convent door: "Ecce Porta Coeli"—"Behold the Gate of Heaven"—: she has already been confronted by the doleful inscription, according to Dante, on the entrance to the inferno: "Through me you pass to the city of sorrows . . . Leave all hope behind ye who enter here."

Cicero, the pagan philosopher, says in one of his books, that it is the part of a wise person to forestall having to say: "I did not expect it." He meant such a person should always be so careful and calculating that she is never taken unawares by any untoward event. If this applies to every earthly oc-

currence of importance, it applies immensely more to the supreme event of the verdict awaiting us in judgment. No wise virgin will ever allow herself to be compelled to say, after the verdict is spoken: "I did not expect it."

*A World of Difference*

The only way to forestall this fatal eventuality is by falling in with our Lord's bidding: "Wherefore be you also ready, because of what hour you know not the Son of man will come" (Matt., 24, 44). Our Lord does not say: "Get ready!" but: "Be ready!" There is a world of difference between the two. If any nun is foiled in judgment it will be because practically she did not attend to this vital difference while she was living on this earth. Instead of always being ready for judgment she counted on being able to get ready when the time of it would come. She did not take into consideration the possibility of being overtaken by death unexpectedly and entirely unprepared.

We sometimes read in the newspapers of girls leading what is called a double life. They pose as being perfectly virtuous and honorable while secretly they pursue a conduct of licentiousness. They maintain criminal relations, let us say, with married men.

*The Place Is Raided*

Let us suppose such a girl, altogether convinced that no one has the least suspicion of her moral irregularity, is keeping an adulterous tryst with a man who is married to another woman. They are congratulating themselves and one another on their success in hiding their crime from everyone, when of a sudden the place in which they are is raided and both are taken into custody preparatory to their appearance before court.

The girl, whose reputation hitherto has been unspotted, when she realizes her terrible plight and the dishonor of her disgraceful exposure, grows hysterical with consternation and shame, and pleadingly, with many sobs and sighs, she entreats the arresting officer, saying: "Officer, please do not take me to prison and have me cited before court. It will be the ruination of me for life. Hitherto my name and the name of my family have been unsullied. But if the news of my arrest under these circumstances gets out my name and my family's name will be dragged in the mud and become a by-word of obloquy to everyone. I shall never be able to enter my home and face my parents and friends again. Officer, please, be considerate and overlook this offense. I promise you it will never happen again."

*The Patrol Wagon*

The policeman will answer coldly and formally: "Young lady, you should have thought of all that before. Then you would not have done what you did. Now there is nothing left for me to do but my plain duty. Get ready to go to prison at once. The patrol wagon will be here in a minute."

This unfortunate girl can even live down this stigma of shame, if not before men, at least before God, by a penitent and godly life. Her very disgrace may be a blessing in disguise, by arousing her to sincere and permanent conversion. But when a nun allows herself, let us say, grievous transgressions of the holy vows, or of charity, or other virtues, posing the while as an exemplar of religious spirit and virtue in general, and hoping no one will ever become aware of her double life, or the serious discrepancy between her religious profession and her personal conduct, and counting on not being caught in the state of sin by the inexorable sheriff of God: "bitter death": she is taking a risk that is infinitely more precarious.

*As a Thief*

Regarding her our Lord will keep His threat to her saying: "At what hour you think not the Son of man will come" (Luke,

12, 40). "If then thou shalt not watch, I will come to thee as a thief: and thou shalt not know at what hour I will come to thee" (Apoc., 3, 3). Death approaches unforeseen and serves her the summons of the Almighty, exclaiming: "You are due for instantaneous judgment." Then will her eyes be opened and she will cry out in horror: "Doth bitter death separate in this manner?" (1 Kings, 15, 32.)

She, too, will plead, much more urgently than the girl in the story, for one more chance, in view of the fact that her ignominious exposure as a faithless spouse of Christ to all her relatives, friends, acquaintances, pastors, pupils, patients, doctors, etc., will be her unsufferable and eternal undoing. But death, the hardest and most unrelenting of arresting officers, will say mutely but eloquently: "You should have thought of that before. Then you would not have to plead, sob, and whine now. Your tears and entreaties are too late. I have to do as I am charged by the Judge of the living and the dead."

*Jesus Warns Nuns*

To the Sister, to whom all this reads like fiction and the mere creation of a heated or morbid brain, or like the sickly effusion

of a soul obsessed by a narrow-minded, superstitious, and senseless fear, I would recall the parable of the ten virgins, which our Lord seems to have told principally in order to warn all His consecrated brides of their main duty of being always ready for His coming.

The foolish virgins, good as was their reputation for virginity and all round virtue in the community, and particularly favored as they had been by the bridegroom, felt they might take a chance and yield to a momentary self-indulgence and forego vigilance for once; they were sure the bridegroom would never have knowledge of it, since they were fully resolved to *get* ready, instead of always *being* ready, when his approach would be announced.

The outcome was unspeakably fatal and gruesomely sad. The very brevity of our Lord's own account of it is cutting and crushing in the extreme. "But at last came also the other virgins, saying: Lord, Lord, open to us. But He answering said: Amen, I say to you, I know you not" (Matt., 25, 11, 12).

### *A Wonderful Order*

If in the past you have recklessly exposed yourself to the danger of this fate by your

conduct and spiritual attitude, thank Jesus for His longanimity on your behalf, and take to heart His kindly injunction: "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of penance; and do not begin to say, We have Abraham for our Father" (Luke, 3, 8); or, in your case, do not say, for instance, using it alone as an earnest of your salvation: "I belong to a wonderful order of saints. St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Vincent de Paul, or St. Francis de Sales is my spiritual father; St. Scholastica, St. Clare, St. Angela, St. Rita, St. Julia, St. Teresa, is my spiritual mother: for if you are going to be saved, no mere prestige or patronage of others, but your own personal works alone will save you, together with the grace of God, of course. "Watch ye therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour" (Matt., 25, 13).

### *A Humorous Incident*

To relieve, in a way, the heavy and, perhaps, somewhat depressing seriousness of this treatise on death and judgment I may be permitted to relate a little humorous incident which occurred to me while I was preaching a retreat to a number of young Sisters who were all more or less new in the religious life and full of their first fervor and zeal for perfection. Speaking to them on

death and the preparation a good nun makes for it in every retreat, I related a story that was told me years ago by an elderly Father of our order in Rome.

He told me that one time he paid a visit to a hospital. One of the Sisters asked to see him privately on a matter of importance. She confided to him that a mutual infatuation had sprung up between her and one of the doctors. While, fortunately, it had not progressed unto anything that was downright indecent, it had yet advanced to the stage that the physician, as a token of his friendship and love for her, gave her a beautiful and costly ring which she did not have the courage to refuse.

*The Fatal Ring*

After accepting it, however, her mind became very uneasy. She felt she could not ask the superior's permission to keep the ring. In fact, since the superior had not the least suspicion of the amorous relation between her and the doctor, she would not intimate it to her or any other Sister for anything in the world. What worried her most was the thought: "What would the Sisters think of and connect with this ring in case they should find it among my belongings after my demise?"

The fear of their possible suspicions and misgivings because of this ring gave her no rest day and night. She therefore asked the Father if he would not please relieve her of it so she could become normal again; he could dispose of it as he judged fit, provided he would not compromise her. On her part she assured him that she had already confessed her transgression and renounced the dangerous relation to which she owed the ill-boding ring, and would never resume it again. One experience was enough for her. It convinced her that such affairs cost a nun immensely more than they are worth from any angle from which they may be considered.

*She Felt Easy and Happy*

The Father took the ring, promising her he would divert it towards a good purpose without incriminating her in any way. Thereupon she felt easy and happy and thanked the Father warmly for his kindly services. He dismissed her with his blessing and thanked her for the edification with which she provided him by her penitent and God-loving conduct.

In connection with this story I mentioned that, of course, I did not expect any of the Sisters to bring me any rings after the man-

ner of the aforesaid nun. Still, if they were making a good retreat, they would not only clear away from their conscience whatever might embarrass them in judgment; but they would also dispose of such material things among their personal effects which might compromise them or someone else by being discovered after their death, such as certain letters or notes of a very personal nature, photographs, and similar tokens, the purport of which might be misapprehended by a third party.

*Eight Diamond Rings*

Some time after this lecture I was not a little amused when I found on the table in my room a pretty little casket in which there were eight apparently costly diamond rings with a note, saying: "Father, please dispose of these rings as you deem fit." Fortunately the chaplain had posted me in advance regarding what turned out to be an innocent practical joke.

The community, being interested in social welfare work for the most abject poor, especially the indigent Mexicans, received regularly from the generous owner of a novelty shop certain trinkets that did not sell. The rings in question were imitation diamond rings, selling at $2 apiece. Remaining over

in the store they were sent to the Sisters for their charges who would be sure to appreciate them immensely. I did not mind the joke as long as the Sisters did not lose sight of the moral of the story.

*She Had Her Fortune Told*

And now I beg leave to tell an incident that happened to me in connection with my first book for nuns, "Uni Una." Some time after its appearance I was preaching a retreat to Sisters of a large hospital and was asked to visit the sick Sisters in the nuns' infirmary. One of the sick Sisters told me that a companion of hers, who like herself was sick but able to be up and about during a part of the day, was visiting her in her room. The visiting Sister had "Uni Una" in her hand and said playfully to her companion: "Sister, let us open this book and see if it will tell us our fortune by what we strike at opening it."

She opened it at random and struck the page on which a paragraph begins by saying: "To a good Religious a sudden death is not a punishment, but a great grace of God." They both laughed over this bit of fortune telling. An hour later the Sister who had made the suggestion and opened the book died instantaneously. She was a good nun

and worthy of the great grace of a sudden and holy death. While this incident will not encourage the readers to be superstitious, it will profitably actuate them to be always ready for the Lord's summons.

May our death, whether it will be sudden or lingering, because of our intense dress rehearsal of it in the retreat, be worthy of the Bible's characterization: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Ps. 115, 15).

*He Led Her a Fast Pace*

A nun, acting as a very efficient nurse in a hospital in one of the central states, tells a very sad story of the tragic death of a Catholic girl. This unfortunate maiden of about twenty years had fallen violently in love with a divorced man who was completely devoid of character and morality. He led her a fast pace, ruining her virtue and plunging her recklessly from sin to sin, vice to vice, iniquity into iniquity. Soon she was a complete physical, moral, and spiritual wreck.

In her misery she was brought as a charity patient to the hospital of the Sisters who received her kindly and paid her every attention. The nun in charge of her case was a woman of God and a true spouse of Christ, every inch of her. Realizing that

there was no hope for the bodily recovery of her patient, she concentrated her saintly efforts upon her soul's healing and salvation. She spoke to the girl of God and heaven, of Jesus Christ, His love for sinners and His joy at their conversion, and of the great price He paid for their redemption.

*She Appeared Contrite*

It was a long time since the girl had heard these soothing truths before. To her it seemed that she had really never heard them expressed so beautifully, with so much unction, and such irresistible persuasiveness. Then, too, her sad experiences of the bitterness of sin made her understand these truths better than ever. She seemed to turn to God and away from sin with her whole heart, and her whole mind, and all her strength. She received the sacraments with apparent devotion.

Her nurse, the Sister, was not a little edified at seeing her so well disposed, and she congratulated herself upon having been used by God to wrest a soul from the jaws of the devil and show her the way to heaven. She gave the girl a blessed and indulgenced crucifix and asked her to hold it in her hands before her, while she meditated on the infinite love of Jesus for her Who was glad

to die the most bitter death in order that she might die a sweet and happy death in the Lord with the prospect of heaven brightening her soul as she expired. The girl complied with the pious counsels of the good nun and for hours she seemed to contemplate our suffering Savior with visible tenderness of soul and compunction of heart which she indicated by the copious and almost continuous tears that streamed from her eyes.

*He Called Her By Name*

As her life was slowly ebbing away, amid these manifestations of piety and tokens of salvation, of a sudden there appeared at the door of her room her former paramour who had heard of the girl's whereabouts and who without further ado had hastened to the hospital, asked for the number of her room, and made for it with a sort of a passionate and infernal fury, and now stood at the entrance of it. Seeing her, he called her by name.

At the sound of his voice it seemed as though all the unholy passion which the unfortunate maiden had previously entertained for him came to life again. She sighed fitfully and made an attempt to leap from the bed to fly towards him. The Sister, sizing up the situation, restrained the girl from rising, and shielded her from the view

of the man who had caused her downfall. She pressed the crucifix into the girl's hands, saying: "Here is your Lover. Attend to Him. He will not forsake you."

*The Shock Killed Her*

But by this time the miserable girl was already frantic with the vicious love that possessed her. Flinging the crucifix against the wall with hysterical disdain she cried out blasphemously: "I do not want this old Lover. I want him." With that she stretched out her arms to the man who had ruined her. He rushed upon her and they embraced one another furiously. The shock was too much for the sick girl. She died in the adulterous embrace.

A moment after she had declared: "I do not want this old Lover," as she hurled the crucifix against the wall, her wretched soul had to appear before Jesus in judgment. It seemed to be a plastic and most terrible verification of the words of Jesus: "I go: and you shall seek Me. And you shall die in your sin. Whither I go, you cannot come" (John, 8, 21).

*Death Is the Echo of Life*

The unhappy girl's death was a confirmation of the teaching of the Fathers that we

die as we live, and that death is but the echo of our life. Her conversion had been but a sham conversion due to her compulsory sojourn in an environment in which she felt she would feign penitence to please the nun that was attending her.

Had she converted when our Lord called unto her by the voice of conscience in the first stages of her sin, her return to God would have been real, genuine, and productive of salvation. But after she had ignored and trifled with the grace of God in the days of her health, on her deathbed this grace was sufficient, indeed, but too faint as that she, who had abused or neglected it when it was much stronger, and before her habit of sin was not nearly so ingrained as it became later, would be likely to employ and exploit it unto her release from sin and her disposal towards a favorable judgment.

*A Nun Dies*

Dear Sisters, why have I told you so horrid a story? To increase your gratitude towards God for the grace of this retreat which is but an additional and, I should say, an almost irresistible appeal to you to arrange the affairs of your soul in such a manner that when you die, you will clasp the crucifix to your bosom with greater love, sorrow

for sin, and hope of forgiveness than ever before, saying with all the warmth, devotion, and consecration of your heaven-eager soul: "Jesus, my One Love, my Own Love, I want You; You only; You altogether; You forever and ever. 'I to my Beloved, and His turning is towards me. Come, my Beloved" (Cant., 7, 10, 11).

*St. Joan Dies*

When St. Joan of Arc was being burned to death at the stake and the flames enveloped her body more and more, she asked for a crucifix. Her own countrymen did not heed her dying request, but an Englishman had pity on the expiring maiden. He broke a couple of fagots over his knee, bound them together in the form of a cross, and handed it to the saint. Exultingly she welcomed the sign of her salvation and kissed it with passionate ardor, gratitude, and love.

You will not have the opportunity to die a violent death after the manner of Joan of Arc. But while your soul is being consumed with the fire of love for Jesus you, too, will derive your sweetest solace in death from kissing the cross of Christ and pressing it to your heart with the soothing sigh: "Ave Spes Unica!"—"Hail Thou, My Only Hope!"

# Books by the Author

1. **UNI UNA—TO THE ONE GOD MY ONE SOUL:** a retreat book for Religious and Priests and other God-loving and salvation-hungry souls. 719 pages. In imitation leather, $3; cloth, $2.

2. **JESUS AND HIS PETS:** a mission and retreat book for boys and girls. 118 pages. Paper, 50 cents.

3. **THE SERAPHIC HIGHWAY:** a book on the Third Order of St. Francis for members and non-members of the order. 243 pages. $1.00.

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